

**THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**  
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**THE EVALUATION AND USE OF EXTENSIVE READING MATERIALS:**

**A CASE STUDY**

**ROSANA TIGNANELLI**



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Rosana Tignanelli

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### *Length of the Dissertation:*

**19, 485 words**, including references; but excluding titles, subtitles, bibliography and appendices.

## **ABSTRACT**

The current investigation is based on the topic of “The evaluation and use of extensive reading materials”. Throughout this research, I attempted to find out whether a theory-based exploration on the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials is conducive to a more appropriate evaluation and implementation of these materials.

The above mentioned hypothesis was tested through the following research questions:

1. Do theoretical principles help teachers see the significance of, in this case, the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials?
2. Can observation and reflection on pedagogical practices on extensive reading, grounded on theoretical principles, aid educators modify their current classroom work?

The research was a case-study. The hypothesis was tested with the cooperation of a primary 5<sup>th</sup> form teacher and her group of students and the material under investigation was the book “The Secret Garden” and its implementation in extensive reading work. The data collected helped the teacher and myself perceive up to what extent the hypothesis could be tested. By the end of the investigation, it was clear for her that extensive reading was an area of relevance in TESOL. She expanded her criteria of materials evaluation and understood that an orderly planning, in this case, of extensive reading lessons, was effective for her students’ learning.

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*Educational studies ... are a “practical science” in the sense that we do not only want to know facts and understand relations for the sake of knowledge we want to know and understand in order to be able to act and act “better” than we did before.*

Langeveld

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. The context of the investigation**

The current investigation was carried out at the primary level of a private, co-educational, bilingual institution in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The school houses approximately one thousand, five-hundred students in the kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary sections (i.e. the Physical Education and the English Teachers’ Training Colleges). At present, research does not hold an important place in the institution. Only a few educators working in the tertiary level, including myself, are carrying out investigations in the school as a requirement to complete postgraduate studies. However, these pieces of investigative work are not part of an institutional research policy.

As a teacher of English, I have been working in the school for twenty-two years. I initiated my professional practices at the primary section and I also worked in middle and high school. At present I teach Methodology on primary English teaching at the institution’s English Teachers’ Training College. Due to this work, I am greatly involved in primary and this has made me set my investigation in this section of the

school. The topic of the current research is “The evaluation and use of extensive reading materials”; I planned, implemented and evaluated this investigative project with the cooperation of a member of the primary English level and her group of 5<sup>th</sup> form students.

This teacher is a member of a staff out of which half of the educators; they are twelve in all, have a wide experience in teaching English to young learners. Most of them have an average of a twenty-year seniority in the institution. The rest of the teachers are newly graduated from the school’s English Teachers’ Training College.

In this educational organization students attend English lessons for two hours in the afternoons. Specifically speaking, the methodology implemented in the primary English department is content- and also language-based; the course-books that the students use as learning materials are those of the World Club series.

Basically, the pupils’ work is focused on language (i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and also, through content related to other subjects of the school’s curriculum such as History, Geography, Art, Drama and Creative Writing, the pupils are able to develop linguistic and skills competences as well as learn more about the world.

However, the department does not have an established extensive reading programme; the students are assigned different types of extensive reading materials as part of each language core work. The extensive reading lessons are carried out in lockstep; that is, the pupils read set books, usually one for each of the three terms of the school year, together at the same time.

In the particular context of extensive reading as well as in other areas of the teaching-learning process, the school’s mission statement should be the starting point from which curriculum practices are best analyzed, implemented and evaluated at a micro level of the educational organization. It sets the basis on which the institution’s aims and each particular department’s objectives are planned. However, educational institutions are embedded in broader contexts in the macro structure of an educational



system. In terms of the current investigation, the official entity which supervises primary education in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, is “La Dirección de Educación Básica”. It is this organism which actually leads educational policies and supervises schools’ work.

In a recent article, the head of this entity, Professor De Vita (2006), states that one of the aims of primary education is to help students to learn to select, interpret, organize and present information so that learners can build up knowledge autonomously. With specific reference to reading, the official document “*La Escuela lee más*” (in English: “Schools read more”) in *Portal Educativo* resets the 2006 guidelines for the province’s reading programme. This programme encourages reading extensively in L1 at schools with the purpose of having children, youth and adult people acquire linguistic forms, develop self-knowledge, familiarize with other realities and get knowledge from them. For this reason, it is stated in the document that schools will have to provide learners with more access to literary texts and will have to assess teachers on the evaluation of reading materials.

In addition, in a recent publication of the Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología Presidencia de la Nación (2006), an entity within the Ministry of Education, authorities promote that primary students read and find pleasure in literary texts of different genres as well as in non-literary materials, interact with teachers and peers on readings by expressing their personal interpretations of texts and by relating the written discourse with the illustrations and/or diagrams accompanying the texts, to mention but a few.

Susser and Robb (1990) argue that there is a large amount of investigation on L1 extensive reading whereas the literature on FL in the area, quoting Brumfit (1978), has been neglected. In Argentina, as has been stated above, educational authorities have recently set their position on extensive reading in L1 whereas there are no official documents on the role of extensive reading in second/foreign language education. However, Swaffar (1988), cited in Susser and Robb (1990), highlights the importance of extensive reading foreseeing that teachers need to devote more class-time to the

development of the skill as students will be asked to do extensive reading more and more on longer materials or in specific fields of study either in an L1 or L2 as they progress along school work.

What promotes classroom implications derived from extensive reading theory in general and official documentation, on the one hand, and a school's mission statement, on the other? Undoubtedly, it is the learning objectives of an institution's department which set these implications at work. In the particular context of primary education, Halliwell (1992) highlights the importance of both content and attitude goals. The former, she describes, are concerned with the elements of language and ways in which they are used. The latter relate to students' attitudes and responses and particularly to the kind of learning experiences that teachers set up and the relationship and atmosphere of the language classroom. On writing about curriculum planning, White (1988:28) refers to attitude goals as "affective objectives" also stating clearly that they are "recognized ... both as a means and an end of the teaching-learning process" whereas Brown (1995:83) only relates them to "the processes of learning rather than the language content".

In relation to both attitude and content goals, the extensive reading lesson is one of the environments in which pupils, through texts, can perform tasks that contribute to their personal and cognitive development in the light of an institution's mission statement. In the words of British writer Kureishi, interviewed by Quiroga (2006:12), reading implies learning "more than one voice", meaning that several interpretations of the same world exist to give readers expanded versions of facts and opinions and thus enlarge their knowledge.

Particularly with reference to content goals, reading is the means through which most of the school's disciplines are learnt. Also, texts expose learners to the linguistic richness of languages (i.e. first, second and, in some cases, third languages) and their cultures and make students acquire new terminology in the process. Pigada and Schmitt (2006) report on the results of a case study which showed that, through extensive reading, vocabulary and spelling were enhanced and, to a lesser, though important,

extent, meaning and grammatical knowledge as well. In fact, reading passages provide learners with sight vocabulary, the so-called by Krashen (1985) *i* (i.e. the reader's current level of linguistic competence) as well as *i+1* (i.e. elements that the reader has not yet mastered) and general vocabulary with topical knowledge which further aids comprehension. In addition, according to Grant (1987), reading materials develop in students the abilities to read the lines; that is, reading for the gist and details, to read between the lines or interpret the writer's message and to read beyond the lines by trying to figure out up to what extent the message of a piece of discourse is related to and modifies their realities.

In relation to attitude goals, extensive reading lessons are the environments in which learners can identify with story characters and can come to learn more about themselves and others. This promotes an understanding of themselves and people from other cultures, which provides learners with the possibility of developing empathetic and tolerant attitudes to those who think and/or act differently. Thus, texts can help students discuss, in the L2, topics such as love, friendship, loss, death, power, determination, to mention but a few, which are part of and thus make the reading lesson be nearer reality as opposed to what Yorio (1985) in Day and Bamford (1998:4) describes as the "striking... degree of unreality of the ESL reading classes". Finally, in Machura's (1991) terms, the extensive reading lesson sets up the conditions for students to enjoy and find pleasure in reading, which gives them greater self-confidence to read on.

Thus, as Richards (2001) emphasizes, both attitude and content goals should be constructivism-centred. According to him, this learner-centredness should influence the development of reading objectives highlighting the learners' prior knowledge and experiences brought with them to the L2 lesson. In sum, reading should promote the assimilation and accommodation of learners' mental schemas so that these processes can modify their cognitive structures, thus expanding their self-development and knowledge store.

## 1.2. Why a pedagogical change in the school

After some years of experience as a teacher of English, I believe, too, that reading means knowledge and language acquisition as well as the instrument through which learners can understand more of themselves and of the culture of others. Specifically in methodological terms, the reading text can be the springboard from which other abilities can be integrated and consequently, interaction and learning promoted.

Due to this interest, I tried to find out how the primary English teachers of the institution, where I work, conduct the extensive reading area of the L2 curriculum. On a talk with the primary English teacher, who later worked with me in the project, I found that the department's teachers are in charge of selecting reading materials. The staff makes this selection informally; i.e. on the basis of previous, personal experiences that they themselves or other colleagues have had with these materials. But how is it that they proceed after this selection? These teachers do not make before-, while- or after-use evaluations of extensive reading texts or design reading lessons grounded on theoretical principles but apply the methodology ordinarily used in general English lessons for extensive reading purposes. Neither do they work on an established extensive reading programme; reading extensively is part of the general language core work. In sum, the idea that underlies in the primary English department is that it is teachers' experience what counts among the staff; i.e. what is given priority to over theoretical information.

As a consequence of this, I thought that the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials could be a good subject to explore and make known in the department. For the current investigation, the exploration could be related to the following issues:

1. What should be the criteria for the evaluation of reading materials?
2. When should this evaluation take place?
3. Does the design of reading materials matter?

4. Which are the objectives to be set for the development of extensive reading skills?
5. How should a reading lesson be structured so that students can find reading most effective?
6. Do the primary English teachers relate their planning and the evaluation of materials to the school's mission statement?

### 1.3. The literature in the field and the research questions

After evaluating the literature in the field, I focused my work on the following concepts:

- a. Reading as an interactive process.
- b. What is exactly Extensive Reading?
- c. Steps within an extensive reading lesson.
- d. The evaluation of extensive reading materials.
- e. The visual design of extensive reading materials.

I aimed at getting answers to the following research questions throughout the investigation:

1. Do theoretical principles help teachers see the significance of, in this case, the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials?
2. Can observation and reflection on pedagogical practices on extensive reading, grounded on theoretical principles, aid educators modify their current classroom work?

To attempt to find an answer to the following research hypothesis: A theory-based exploration on the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials is conducive to a more appropriate evaluation and implementation of these materials.

#### 1.4. The structure of the study.

This study is divided into six chapters. The first one is the “Introduction” and it sets the investigation in its context in relation to the institution, the most relevant concepts of the literature in the area, the research questions and the reasons why the research was carried out. It ends with a description of the structure of the study and a conclusion.

The remaining chapters start with an introduction and end with a conclusion except for the last one in which I wrote some “Final words”. Chapter 2 deals with the most relevant concepts of the literature review in the area. Chapter 3 describes the research methods and instruments used for the completion of the work. The project is a case study and the investigation involved triangulation; that is, an interview to the teacher participating in the project, an evaluative analysis of extensive reading materials, lesson plans, teacher diary-notes, my own observations of the teacher’s work on theoretical principles about extensive reading and the implementation of the materials, and students’ evaluations were sources used for data-collection purposes. Chapter 4 presents the findings that resulted from the investigation. The teacher’s, the students’ and my own observations are transcribed in an attempt to show a pluralism of opinions in the findings.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the analysis of the findings and the conclusions of the investigation. However, this research work did not do without its limitations. These are also discussed in Chapter 5 together with the experience of the teacher-development session in which the investigation was presented and submitted to the discussion and involvement of the teaching staff.

#### Conclusion

The current introduction has helped to set the investigation in context. Likewise, it has described the reasons why the research was carried out. Also, a structure of the

dissertation is presented with the aim of providing readers with an overview of the whole process of the investigation on “The Evaluation and Use of Extensive Reading Materials”.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In the current chapter I will review the literature in the area of investigation. Firstly, I will describe the concept of reading as an interactive process. Secondly, I will emphasize on the methodological procedure of extensive reading lessons since I believe that it is in the actual classroom work where the school's ideals are reflected and the basis on which teachers' planning and practice helps students modify their realities. Finally, specific information will be given about the evaluation and design of reading materials.

### **2.1. Reading as an interactive process**

Over the last forty years and running parallel to behaviouristic psychological trends and teaching methodologies such as the Grammar-Translation method or Audiolingual approaches, reading was seen as a receptive, passive skill. Learners were expected to read lines literally and be engaged in mechanical post-reading exercises. Later, whereas advocates of the Input Hypothesis such as Krashen (1985, 1987, 1989) and Mason and Krashen (1997), to mention but a few, stated that reading was one of the media for language acquisition, the skill was also seen as an interactive experience.

In fact, Wallace (1992) mentioned Smith (1971) as one of the first researchers to describe "reading" as a process. Swain (1999) quoted in Jacobs and Gallo (2002), states that comprehensible input in large doses, though essential as it is, is not enough for students to become optimal second language readers. According to this writer, input turned into intake should be combined with output. In other words, reading cannot be a skill that students develop in isolation; rather, it is via reading that students receive information that they process and re-elaborate and turn into oral and/or written productions.



Interactively speaking, Day and Bamford (1998:12) define reading in the following terms: It "...is the construction of meaning from a printed or written message" and Nuttall (1996) describes it as understanding what the writer of a text has tried to convey. Likewise, Devine and Eskey (1998) define reading as a meaning-focused process of construction and that represented in a series of cycles, each of which moves readers through the text and helps them get a meaning. In similar terms, Allende González (1994) defines reading as a very special mode of communication through which much of the writer's message can be left out and several pieces of content that the writer did not think of can be included.

Grabe (1988) explains that reading is like a conversation between the text and the reader. The Schema theory, also cited in Grabe (1988), Richard-Amato (1988), Wallace (1992) and Nuttall (1996) among several others, helps explain this process of interaction. Schemata are constructed in our minds through experiences. As such an experience, reading, then, activates human minds and modifies these schemata adding new information and helping readers predict how the text will go on in an interactive continuum between text and reader and among readers themselves.

More than three decades have gone by since reading was firstly seen as a process of interaction that learners unconsciously experience while they bring, to the reading situation, their background and current personal and linguistic knowledge to get near the writer's intentions. Evidence of this is described by the Parkers (1991:180) when they state that "the skilled reader interacts with the text using existing knowledge, as well as the information on the page, to approximate the author's intended message". Additionally, reading strategies and/or comprehension tasks appropriately used in extensive reading lessons such as skimming, scanning and identifying discourse functions, to mention but a few, help readers access texts. Likewise, Eskey (1988) in Wallace (1992:47) explains that matching is fundamental "to ensure that text, context and reading task give maximum support to the L2 learner's current linguistic and schematic knowledge" to make readers benefit from an interaction between themselves and a text.

## 2.2. What exactly is Extensive Reading?

According to Hill (2006) from the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading, the concept is defined as reading in quantity with the purpose of learning the language and of acquiring fluency for extensive writing. He makes the difference between library extensive reading, which is based on the quantity of books that students read, and class reading related to the quality of the reading experience and, as mentioned earlier, with the possibility that learners can interact with texts and over the content of the book with the teacher or among themselves. This class reading can be conducted in lockstep or by individual students, each reading different books and at different paces.

Bamford and Day (2004) explain extensive reading as a set of ten principles:

- 1- Texts should be of easy access to students. Ideally, there should be a very few number of unfamiliar words to learners. It is suggested that there should be no more than one or two for beginners and four or five for intermediate students per page.
- 2- Teachers should present students with a variety of reading materials; that is, different topics and genres for them to read for different purposes (i.e. for pleasure or for information, to mention but a few). Likewise, educators should provide learners with a variety of activities which develop in them abilities such as predicting, skimming, scanning, etc.
- 3- Students should be given the possibility of selecting what they want to read and giving their opinions.
- 4- Readers should read as much as they can because in this resides the success of the programme.
- 5- Extensive reading promotes fluent reading. Learners can also read fast because they are presented with easy texts. Likewise, they should be encouraged to guess the

meaning of unknown words from the context and not to use the dictionary because this lowers the pace of their reading.

6- The purpose of extensive reading is for pleasure, information and overall understanding. Learners are not expected to understand every single detail that texts present.

7- Extensive reading should be silent and at the students' pace.

8- Students are asked to complete follow-up tasks after reading. Broadly speaking, these tasks are aimed at relating the reading experience with some other area of the school curriculum and at integrating reading with listening, speaking and/or writing.

9- The teacher's role is that of a facilitator of students' reading processes. She guides and assesses learners' work and helps them in getting the most out of the reading experience.

10- Teachers should be good models of readers by reading the same materials that students are reading and exchanging opinions about them with learners.

As mentioned above, extensive reading can be conducted in different ways. Out of them, school library extensive reading appears to be the most difficult one for teachers to be engaged in as participants with learners. In the school library context, educators are rather more obliged to supervise student work and control discipline. Furthermore, students can do the reading in the library but not at the same reading pace, which provokes that they cannot be engaged as pairs/groups in further activities when their rhythm is different as there are individual differences in a classroom.

However, setting up a classroom library for extensive reading purposes can be motivating and enriching for learners. They can bring their own materials from home and share them with their classmates and teacher during the year. This together with the

possibility of selecting themselves the materials that they want to read provide them with autonomy at classroom work. As a strong believer in interactional processes of learning, I think that classroom extensive reading promotes interaction between reader and text and also between or among peers over the content of the reading text. This interaction is not fully feasible in the school library; let alone at home where learners do not have the possibility of talking over their reading experiences with classmates or teachers. Contrastively, extensive reading as lockstep or in a classroom library turns reading interactively into a realistic possibility.

On a questionnaire titled “Why do you like Extensive Reading?” Wariy (1990) interviewed several educators who gave their opinions on the area. The one that seemed to summarize an overall view on the subject states that, not only does exposure to written discourse provide learners with sight-vocabulary and authentic input but, creates a can-do environment in which the reading text is the springboard for learners to build up further knowledge in the process of reading, interacting with the text and working with peers.

### 2.3. Steps within an extensive reading lesson

What can, then, make a reading lesson distinct from others? In relation to reading as an interactive process, Hutchinson and Torres (1994:317) quote Allright (1981) who points out that what this interaction should produce are opportunities for each and every student to learn in personal and academic terms out of the reading lesson. Evidence of this is found in Carrell (1998), cited by Powell (2006), when the objective of reading is seen as reading to learn and not learn to read. According to Etcheverry (2006), reading expands individuals’ knowledge of the world and helps them not to get trapped into a “linguistic insecurity”. The phrase essentially denotes the incapacity of those who do not read enough to communicate properly with others to make sense of their arguments.

Therefore, educators are the agents that can make this interaction through reading feasible. On the one hand, teachers can use texts which have not been specifically designed for language teaching but to inform or entertain. On the other hand, the focus of these lessons should be on meaning and their aim on aiding learners derive messages from written discourse. To authors such as Rosenshine (1980), Alderson and Urquhart (1984), Alderson (1988) and Barnett (1988), all of them cited in Susser and Robb (1990), this aim can be achieved when teachers help learners benefit from reading texts by providing them with activities that engage them in comprehension. In Gonzalez Morón, Lanús and Rodríguez Amenabar's (2006) opinion, these activities should be of a wide variety and distinct complexity. Likewise, Gardner (1978), also quoted by Susser and Robb (1990), assigns importance to the fact that teachers plan comprehension tasks in their extensive reading lessons since these are activities that students do not automatically use into daily instruction.

Theoretically, whereas Lunzer and Gardner (1979), Smith (1983) and Goodman (1987) in Wallace (1992) reveal that researchers cannot talk about reading skills but strategies, the development of reading is viewed, in general terms, with reference to stages of abilities development. Chall (1983) in Grabe (1988) identifies a five-stage theory of reading development: 1. Pre-reading; 2. Initial reading; 3. Confirmation; 4. Reading for new information and 5. Construction and re-construction. In methodological terms and for a better setting up of a learning environment which fosters pleasant, effective reading, Harmer (1991) proposes a model, which can be adapted to extensive reading sessions and which is basically made up of six steps:

### I: Lead-in

First and foremost, it is important that teachers activate students' schemata in relation to the theme of texts and aid student motivation as Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) in Carrell et al. (1988) point out. Evidence of this is also reported in Bransford et al (1984:33) when they state that "potential knowledge must be activated in order to facilitate people's abilities to comprehend..." A good introduction relates the students to the text: The topic, the title and cover, as Scott and Ytreberg (1990) indicate, the

author and his/her biography, the blurb of the material, etc. It need not be too long. At this stage, teachers' main objective is to familiarize learners with the topic of the text that they are going to read.

Therefore, examples of tasks proposed in relation to the text at this stage should contribute to language learning and support learning in general, as Oxford (1990) points out, and help readers choose selectively while dealing with texts. These tasks are:

- Previewing (on visual elements accompanying the text, interpreting titles, reading and commenting on blurbs, etc.);
- Predicting (e.g. giving only the first and the last sentences of a paragraph of a text and ask students to reconstruct what has been omitted, ask students to determine the original order of a number of detached paragraphs, etc.). At this stage, learners can have different points of view which are neither confirmed nor disconfirmed but rather they have to wait till reading unfolds so that they can get the information, thus regarding or disregarding their previous ideas. A top-down approach towards reading which involves the implementation of the activities just described supports learners in giving them confidence to see that they have their own background knowledge which can contribute to the understanding of a text.
- Brainstorming or semantic mapping (e.g. providing the students with a key word and then asking them to associate words or concepts with this key word).
- Signposting (i.e. give students questions which help them to go along the right reading track and which, at the same time, set them with a purpose for reading).

## II: First reading

While reading, students are not asked to complete any tasks. Wallace (1992:95) prescribes that while-reading activities “attempt... to replicate the process which occurs spontaneously in ... readers...; i.e. ...predict the continuation of a text”. These tasks are unconscious in learners; their use in the classroom is of doubtful effectiveness since they would appear to make explicit what is actually implicit in the readers’ minds. A further criticism to while-reading activities states that they interrupt the flow of communication between the text, on the one hand, and the reader, on the other.

## III: Comprehension tasks 1

Once the students have been exposed to a first-sight reading, Harmer (1991) prescribes that they can complete activities which basically help them develop, what he calls, “Type 1” skills such as getting the general picture (i.e. skimming) and/or extracting specific information (i.e. scanning) as well as confirming or disconfirming previous anticipations made about a text at the lead-in stage. Widdowson (1979) in Carrell et al (1988:37) points out that “one has comprehended a text” when one “has found a mental “home” for the information in the text, or... modified an existing mental home in order to accommodate that new information” as prescribed by the Schema theory. Thus, there is a direct connection between stages I) and III) within a reading lesson since it is at these two steps when teachers engage children’s prior knowledge before reading and then help them find the association between the background and the new information provided by the text.

## IV: Second reading

This is the second time that learners are exposed to the text. Now they can read it on their own either silently or in a loud voice to their peers.

## V: Comprehension tasks 2

After the previous steps, students can: Extract detailed information, recognize functions and discourse patterns and deduce meaning from context, to mention but a few.

## VI: Text-related tasks

Finally, students are encouraged to see the text as a whole and stimulated to make either an oral or written production in relation to it. Broadly speaking, examples of these tasks are: Oral and written reading reports, drama and role play, creative writing, vocabulary consolidation and humanistic activities, to mention but a few.

The six steps within a reading lesson as described by Harmer (1991) can be well applied to a class in which extensive reading can be conducted as lockstep on a set book. However, some modifications need to be made when students engage in silent extensive reading with materials of their own selection in, for example, a school or classroom library context. In these situations, teachers need to design cards which guide children through the process of extensive reading. Activities for the pre- and post-reading stages can be suggested in the card giving students the possibility of selecting the ones that they would like to complete. Also, learners can skip the “Second reading” step or complete it only if they find it necessary.

At the very end of reading a text extensively, global understanding must be reconsidered so that the students can re-view the very first predictions that they made and talk about the writer’s objectives and the main message of the text. This recreation of reading experiences helps see reading extensively essentially as the instrument used by teachers to allow students not only to acquire new language in the process but to go beyond linguistic boundaries, to know more and to grow up. As Goldberg (2003) points out, in a world of technological advances and a superiority of mass media, such as television, over the written word, children have to be encouraged to see that stories are



also “windows” that open to the unknown and to emotions and help experience new situations which allow learners to look into themselves, learn and read on.

#### 2.4. The evaluation of extensive reading materials: Phase one

Not disregarding the Deficiency and Difference view approaches to the role of learning materials, which implies an analysis of texts considering what key features of design materials are missing and a contrast between positive and negative aspects of different texts, Allright (1981) highlights the importance of who takes the decision of evaluating materials before class-use. He emphasizes that it is relevant that educators or students or both of them working cooperatively can take those decisions. In other words, the emphasis is put on the evaluator; that who actually uses the materials. Susser and Robb (1990) argue that, in the past, attention was not paid sufficiently to the evaluation of extensive reading materials. However, Tomlinson (1998) views texts as the fundamental aid in the ELT classroom, implicitly focusing, then, on the relevance of the process of evaluation of texts.

Reading materials are subject to analysis as observed in different phases of planning and implementation and with different purposes: formative, summative, and developmental, to mention but a few. For the current investigation, the purpose of evaluation is merely summative, i.e. the results obtained are meant to inform decisions on the implementation of materials for classroom use.

Grant (1987) proposes a very simple test to carry out an initial evaluation of materials. The test is called “catalyst” and its eight letters indicate key concepts that should be evaluated. These concepts are: Communication, aims, teachability, available adds-on, level, impression of the teacher, student interest and whether the text has already been tried and tested. Breen and Candlin and Dougill in Sheldon (1987), and Sheldon (1988) add to this list the following factors: Availability, layout/graphics, accessibility, appropriacy, authenticity, sufficiency, cultural bias, educational validity, stimulus/practice/revision and flexibility.

However, Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) present a more detailed evaluation of ELT materials, including some factors indicated above. They point out that agents involved in the teaching process can firstly evaluate materials when these are seen as workplan. This same phase is termed by Sheldon (1987) as an Input evaluation of materials.

During this first moment, evaluators have to consider two broad aspects: Content and methodology. As regards the former, the purpose of the materials must firstly be defined and the type of exercises which supplement these materials has to accomplish the purpose effectively and economically. In other words, texts and tasks should help students achieve the school's aims for the L2 curriculum and the specific objectives of the department.

Secondly, the linguistic legibility of texts, according to Allende González (1994), relates to the familiarity and frequency of the use of words and the length of sentences in a text. Learners should be able to understand the overall concepts and ideas of the content easily with a minimum amount of new words which help them guess the meaning of unfamiliar terms from the context. Likewise, the length of the text should not be intimidating so that students cannot get bored or discouraged at reading it and culturally speaking, it should be acceptable to learners.

Thirdly, the concepts of interest and appropriacy, as termed by Allende González (1994) as “psychological legibility”, and authenticity play a very important role in the evaluation. On the one hand, the topic of the reading should be enjoyable and the text of genuine interest to learners. Teachers have to evaluate materials taking into account students' age, their social and cultural background and the composition of the class as well as leave the reader with the perception that the language of the writer cannot be improved.

According to Schickedanz et al. (1993), children's interests in topics vary according to their age. Thus, four to five-year-olds enjoy books which deal with their own intimate family and life situations. Learners between six to eight also like these

topics while beginning to be a little more independent and empathetic with others. On the contrary, at the age-range of nine to twelve, children value the points of view of others and enjoy reading about families and friends, which provides them with an insight into the situation of other people. It is important that the kind of reading that they do has a well-developed plot and characters and that it can be perceived as credible by learners.

On the other hand, Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) state that authenticity signifies that a text must be meaningful and challenging. More specifically, Williams and Moran (1989) explain that authenticity is involved when the reader understands the writer's message and can construct the text again in line with his/her own experiences. Likewise, Nutall (1996: 177) describes authentic materials not only as those which motivate students but "exhibit the characteristics of true discourse: Having something to say, coherent and clearly organized". Davies (1984:192) puts it in these terms "Authenticity... is a matter of the involvement of the audience: It is not that a text is understood because it is authentic but that it is authentic because it is understood". Unlike other writers, Davies (1984) prescribes that the teacher's role is the one of judging the relevance of the materials and it is the learner who authenticates it. Interestingly enough, Wallace (1992:81), quoting Breen (1985), "proposes that teachers ask themselves two questions for the judgement of the authenticity of a text: 1) Can the learner's prior knowledge, interest and curiosity be engaged by this text? 2) In what ways might the learner authenticate the text, i.e. adapt it to his or her own purposes?"

Alliende González (1994) integrates the terms "interest", "appropriacy" and "authenticity" in the phrase "conceptual legibility". This writer foresees that topics that may appear to interest readers at the start cannot relate positively to legibility if they are not meaningful to those who read them. Meaningfulness relates to the importance that readers attribute to texts in relation to their own experiences.

Methodologically speaking, the materials should present teachability; i.e. texts need to seem reasonably simple to use, well-organized and easy to find one's way round. The activities, either accompanying the materials or designed by teachers, have

to encourage the personal involvement of the learners. Text-related tasks have to foster interaction between readers and text and among peer-students and Allende González (1994) categorizes them as having “pragmatic legibility”. Finally, adds-on such as videos, cassettes, posters, etc. supplement the reading text and help teachers promote interaction through text-related tasks.

## 2.5. The visual design of reading materials

In relation to visual design, Hafiz and Tudor (1989:10) indicate that “an attractive cover, good-quality illustrations, and a clear typeface can help to attract and maintain learners’ attention”. Among others, Ellis and Ellis’ (1987) design criteria for EFL course-books proposes an interesting outline that can well be used for considering the design of extensive reading materials.

Firstly, these two writers highlight relevance of design as a key point in the evaluation. The title, chapters, headings and illustrations have all to be relevant to the text. They should focus on and reflect central aspects of the written discourse. Likewise, the material has to be relevant to the audience; i.e. to students who are going to read it. Both topics and linguistic forms should be at the right level for the learners, who also need to be exposed to a variety of design in accordance with their age-range. Finally, the colours used in the visual layout are expected to attract learners’ attention; no matter whether the illustrations are colourful or they are merely printed in black and white. They have to be used with the purpose of enhancing the text and complementing the theme of the written discourse.

Secondly, a key concept in the area of design is accessibility. Materials need to have a clear reading path; access to them means that learners find clarity in the structure of texts. It is important that this clarity is evidenced in the way in which pupils pass from one part of the text to another or even from text to pictures and from pictures to text. The pages and covers should be of a good quality and cohesion should be reflected, for example, on the location of the page numbers and the typeface, which includes both the size and style of the letters, spaces between words and lines and also

spaces between paragraphs, to mention but a few. Type sizes and styles should vary according to the different emphasis that writers give to the main part of a text, captions and footnotes, on the one hand, and titles, subtitles and general information of the text, on the other. In sum, students should find the lay-out helpful in letting them find their way through the pages.

Not only are relevance and accessibility key elements in the design of materials but the visual elements that accompany texts as well. In a brief introduction on the interpretation of illustrations in ELT materials, Hewings (1991:237) defines the term “illustration” as “drawings, cartoons, photographs, charts, graphs and tables”; that is, all that cannot be regarded as “text” but which accompanies it, is used to describe a location or situation and motivates learners to practise language to talk about and through pictures, terms borrowed from Professor Pit Corder (1963) and cited in Hill (1990). The Parkers (1991) as well as House (1997) state the priority of illustrations, especially in books for ESL young learners. They explain that illustrations need not be large but support the text and promote children’s understanding.

Likewise, the views and opinions of well-known illustrators of books for children highlight the importance given to the visual elements of texts. Among this group, Kovacs and Preller (1991) comment that the focus that learners can impinge on visual design makes them be more observant in their everyday lives and, for this reason, he gives as much importance to design as to words. In addition, the accompanying illustrations of texts stimulate students’ interest in reading, let their imagination flow and motivate learners to respond to the lines. The use of pictures help children develop their anticipation and speculation skills, essential in the reading and interpretation processes.

Further, Kovacs and Preller (1991) point out on the importance of making students interact with the visual elements of the text and advocate for the presentation of tasks which make this interaction possible. Finally, Morgan Bowen (1982) emphasizes that illustrations are non-linguistic elements which provide learners with visual input, especially to those pupils who are more visually- than text-oriented and help them

understand situations and apprehend new knowledge, on the one hand and, according to Skehan (1989), aid that teachers can reconcile individual learners' needs and wants with the materials and tasks proposed for classroom-use, on the other. Through the use of illustrations, Wright (1989) highlights that learners can practice speaking more and visual elements can be the springboard for the completion of pre- and post- reading tasks that stimulate the integration of other skills.

## 2.6. The evaluation and design of extensive reading materials: Phases two and three

In a second phase of the evaluation process, Grant (1987) proposes that materials should be seen in terms of suitability. In other words, he prescribes that evaluators ask themselves, firstly, whether a text is suitable to students in terms of attractiveness, cultural acceptability, needs and interests, level of difficulty, length, appropriacy and authenticity. Further, the question resides whether the text is suitable to the teacher in relation to teachability and availability of supplementary materials and with reference to the opinions that other colleagues have on the book. Finally, the suitability of a text is mainly referred to the syllabus and the examinations; that is, if it has been recommended by authorities or examination evaluators and whether it follows official or examination syllabuses requirements. For other writers such as Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992), all the concepts described by Grant (1987) are to be evaluated at an initial stage of the process.

While materials are in use, Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) identify indicators which show evidence of the response of students to them. During this phase, materials are evaluated in relation to learners' involvement in the theme presented by texts; i.e. on the pupils' positive or negative reaction to readings and tasks proposed and the response that they give to culturally-specific elements of written discourses.

As mentioned earlier, students' participation in pre- and post-reading tasks facilitates that learners' reactions can be observed with reference to materials. It goes without saying that how students respond to adds-on such as video and the use in class that can be assigned to the visual elements of texts are also indicators that help evaluate

materials. This second phase is defined by Sheldon (1987) as a Throughput evaluation of materials.

Finally, a last phase in the process is what both Sheldon (1987) and Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) categorize as the analysis of “Outcomes from materials”.

Broadly speaking, this phase aims at representing the relative achievement of learners in relation to the reading of texts. Observers and students can participate in this process. The former can find in checklists or evaluations how well/badly learners responded to the material and figure out the proportion and/or percentages of good results out of the total number of students in the class. The latter can respond to the materials by giving their own opinions of texts and, more formally, by completing reader evaluation sheets.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused the work on the area of “The evaluation and use of extensive reading materials”. Additionally, the literature review helped me enlarge my knowledge in the field and contributed to a great extent to the theoretical information provided to the teacher participating in the implementation phase of the investigation and to the design of the tasks that were further conducted as part of the process. The following chapter deals with a detailed description of the research methods and instruments used to test the hypothesis of the current investigative project.

### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

Throughout the investigation, I posed myself the following general questions:

1. Do theoretical principles help teachers see the significance of, in this case, the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials?
2. Can observation and reflection on pedagogical practices in this area, grounded on theoretical principles, aid educators modify their current classroom work?

To attempt to find an answer to the following research hypothesis: A theory-based exploration on the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials is conducive to a more appropriate evaluation and implementation of these materials.

At the outset of the project and after an informal talk with one of the staff teachers on her evaluation criteria and use of extensive reading materials, I laid out and later conducted a formal questionnaire to the teacher on the topic under investigation. The questionnaire focused on subtopics such as: The school's mission statement, content and attitude goals, reading objectives, evaluation criteria of materials, the steps within an extensive reading lesson and the visual design of materials.

The interview with the teacher confirmed the ideas that I had about the work that she had been doing in the area. It was evident that she tried to vary the type of activities that she conducted and that she had a clear idea of the concepts of content and attitude goals as well as the type of reading objectives that she set in the planning of her lessons. However, she lacked theoretical information on methodological aspects and, more especially, on evaluation of materials.

As stated in my research hypothesis, I think that theoretical principles contribute to help teachers understand the significance of a topic in their area of teaching, observe



and reflect on their work and as a consequence of this, modify their daily practice. Having read extensively on the subject under investigation, I made a selection of theoretical information grounding my decisions on the teacher's needs on the topic and on the accessibility that the reading texts to be proposed had to her. I also laid out a series of worksheets so that the teacher could read from the theory and, through her work on the extensive reading material that she used; i.e. "The Secret Garden", reflect on her practice. These materials; i.e. the reading texts and worksheets, were handed out to the teacher in four training sessions. We had a meeting after each session during which she asked questions, clarified ideas and both of us discussed the topics to the light of her actual experience of work.

The four training sessions contributed that the teacher decided to modify her work on extensive reading lessons. I was able to observe that she planned her classes differently, especially in the orderly presentation of tasks and in the introduction of prediction activities at the lead-in stage of the classes. This was examined in the lay-out of her lesson planning and reflected on in the actual observation of the work in her diary-writing. Also, I watched on her group of students' reactions and responses to the materials and tasks through an observation scheme which was specially designed for the project. At the end of the presentation of the extensive reading materials, the pupils were given a questionnaire so that they could give their opinions on the materials and contribute to the evaluation of the outcomes.

The current investigative project is a case-study and the research questions were attempted to be answered by triangulation; i.e. by a combination of methods: interview, observation studies, diary and questionnaires, which were all piloted and tested as a means of verifying the clarity of the language and the message of the discourse.

What follows is, then, a detailed description of the methods used for the work:

### 3.1. Interview

This method was used as a means of finding out the participant-teacher's criteria for the evaluation of extensive reading materials and her experience in using them. As importantly, it attempted to raise the teacher's awareness on her strengths and weaknesses on extensive reading and on the need to explore the significance of the theory so that it could contribute to her daily practice. Also, I tried to know about her willingness to learn new procedures in evaluating and using "extensive reading materials".

A sample of the questionnaire sheet can be found in Appendix A and extracts of the most significant parts of the interview, in Appendix B. The interview, which was recorded and from which I took down some personal notes, was of the semi-structured type for the following reasons: 1. I could have an idea of where the interview went and what came out of it, and 2. I was able to follow up and expand on concepts expressed by the teacher. Likewise, I thought that a face-to-face contact with the teacher; that is, what an interview could foster differently from other methods of data-collection, could give me a wider insight into the teacher's pedagogical ideas and work through the actual expression of her views. Also, the exchange of ideas that could occur between both of us could greatly enrich and expand the development of the subject and provide me with a better understanding of the teacher's work and how I should go on with the procedure of subsequent steps within the investigation.

The interview was analyzed in qualitative terms in a summary of the results, which will be specified on in Chapter 4. Consequently, I was able to design the contents and reflection tasks of the training sessions that I provided the teacher with so that she could enlarge her knowledge on the subject. Details of the worksheets designed and the bibliography used during the training course can be found in Appendix C.

### 3.2. Observation studies

After a two-month period, I was able to complete my observation of the teacher's training work. First, she reflected on readings proposed and completed an analysis of the material as work-plan. The categories that she used for such an analysis are presented in the design of the training sessions (Appendix C). The formal analysis as work-plan that she made of the book "The Secret Garden" can be found in Appendix D and the conclusions of such an analysis will be presented in Chapter 4.

Then, the teacher initiated the experience in which the extensive reading material was presented and used with her group of students. The most significant parts of her lesson planning can be found in Appendix E and a summary of the changes that she introduced in the methodological procedure will be presented in Chapter 4.

The studies were analyzed in qualitative and quantitative terms. On the one hand, the observation of the teacher's study of the topic under investigation during the training sessions was aimed at examining the importance that she attributed to the subject. On the other hand, during the observation of the group at the implementation phase, I gathered information on the evaluation of materials in-process, which was discussed with the teacher at the end of each lesson; thus opening up the opportunity for reflection on the work done and the possibility of acting accordingly.

The study of the group was of the structured type to identify the initial reactions and responses of the students towards the reading material under observation for eight (8) lessons (i.e. the period of time during which the reading material was used in class). The reactions and responses of the learners were recorded in figures and percentages at their initial stage since it was considered that, during the development of each lesson, these responses and reactions could be altered by factors inherent to the classroom situation but external to this investigation. A model of the observation scheme used for this quantitative registration of the data can be found in Appendix F, the results of these observations are recorded in Appendix G whereas the most salient details of these results will be presented in Chapter 4.

Also, I took into account other facets that the pupils showed in relation to the material and the methodology used in the classroom which were not captured by the observation scheme proper. I took down notes of these observations and the comments were registered qualitatively below the scheme. The most significant parts of these comments will be presented in Chapter 4.

In my opinion, observation studies are a direct method of collecting information and instruments through which I could easily discover the actual way in which, on the one hand, the teacher responded to the theoretical information presented to her; and, on the other, the students reacted and responded to the materials. They contributed to provide a deeper insight into the teacher's awareness of the relevance of the topic under investigation and a more objective view into the pupils' reactions and responses than, for example, the questionnaire which, as will be specified on later, helped gather information but from a more subjective point of view.

### 3.3. Diary

The participant-teacher was asked to report on the reading lessons in which the material under observation was used. This method of data-collection was aimed at testing whether observation and reflection on pedagogical practices helped modify these practices.

The diary-writing was not structured at all. I requested the teacher to take down notes on the observations that she could make herself during the development of the lessons in relation to the students' reactions and responses to the materials and her own impressions on the methodological procedures implemented. I found that, if the teacher could write on her own experiences of work, this would provide the investigation with a new perspective on the evaluation of the material in process. It would sum up two views to the interpretation of the findings since, at that moment, I would be counting on my observations of the work and the teacher's particular opinion of the phase. The extracts of the most significant parts of the teacher's diary-writing are specified on in

Appendix H and I analyzed the results of the data obtained from the diary in qualitative terms, which are summarized in Chapter 4.

### 3.4. Questionnaires

At the end of the implementation phase of the project, the teacher's group of students received a "Story Evaluation sheet" with questions to answer about the book that they read in class. This data-collecting method was used with the objective of gathering information on the outcome of the material that could help observe and reflect on teaching practices for a likely modification of classroom work.

The evaluation sheet was adapted from Greenwood (1998), given to the students to complete and return to the teacher on the last day of the implementation phase. The questionnaire was selected for being a direct, quick way of gathering information once the students had been presented with the whole of the material and of getting their opinions "on the spot"; that is, immediately after they had finished reading the book and on the information that was required for evaluation and reflection purposes within the context of the investigation. After that, I analyzed the results of these questionnaires in quantitative terms. A sample of the "Story Evaluation sheet" can be found in Appendix I. As conducted previously, the results are detailed in Appendix J and conclusions of these questionnaires administered to the students, specified on in Chapter 4.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarized again the research questions that I posed to myself at the beginning of the investigation and that were attempted to be answered in the course of the research. A detailed description of the methods and instruments used can also be found as a means of clarifying and exemplifying the procedures carried out during the implementation phase. The following chapter will evidence the presentation of the findings of the investigative project.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS**

### Introduction

The findings of the current investigation are various and of quantitative and qualitative types. The following is a chronological description of those findings that resulted from the implementation phase of the work.

#### 4.1. Results obtained from the interview to the teacher participating in the project

From the very beginning the participant-teacher showed her compromise towards the project. She showed herself involved with the topic, descriptive in her opinions and also cautious in her answers. She did not make any notoriously significant gestures to express her ideas or objected to being recorded.

Broadly speaking, the interview can be divided into two parts. During the first part (i.e. from the beginning up to “Interviewer: Do you consult the teachers who have already had your group ...?/ Interviewee: Oh, yes, always.”), the teacher answered the questions using the notes that she had written down as a preparation for the interview. She was inclined to expand her answers; at times, it was not necessary for me to ask some of the pre-planned questions because they had already been answered by the interviewee. As for the second part (i.e. beginning at “Interviewer: Do you attend book presentations ...?” up to the end), she rather limited herself to answer the questions proposed. As an interviewer, I did not have to make any specific explanations of the language used and the interviewee did not come across any difficulties which might have hindered the comprehension of the questions or biased somehow the content of the interview.

More specifically speaking, I found out that the teacher evaluated and used extensive reading materials on the basis of her own experience which, to a certain extent, coincides with the criterion suggested by theoretical principles. According to the answers, the teacher initiates the process of evaluating the materials “most of the times” at the beginning of the school year; that is, after she gets to know her group of students. In her own words, she evaluates books taking into account “the topics” the students “are interested in” ; that is, “stories in which they can feel identified ...stories children take part ... so” the students “can feel identified with the characters”. In relation to learners’ linguistic level and the potential that texts can offer to students, she said: “I try to look for books which have the tenses they already know” so that the learners can get practice on specific linguistic contents. In general terms, the teacher gets information from catalogues, introductions and blurbs of extensive reading materials, consults colleagues during the process of evaluation and confirms that the materials do not contain cultural traits which may be offensive to learners.

Also, the interviewee finds, either in the suggested use or in her own design of pre- and post-reading tasks, opportunities for learners to speak and write about their reading experiences and helps students express their opinions and feelings about texts through the so-called “Humanistic activities”. With reference to this, she commented that she evaluated “stories in which” the students “can perceive the characters’ feelings and emotions.” She added that “... not only is the plot important ... but the expression of feelings as well ... through this the students can draw conclusions ... imagine endings ...” Finally, the teacher considers the concepts of length, printing, illustrations, suggested adds-on but, above all, the content of the material itself relevant issues within the evaluation criterion and gives importance to the use of authentic materials in extensive reading lessons.

However, when asked about student participation in the process of evaluating extensive reading materials before and after reading experiences, the teacher answered that she did not use to involve learners in the process but considered that in the future “that would be interesting”. She fails in taking into account a lot more number of

variables that, theoretically speaking, are parts of the criterion for evaluation purposes (e.g. visual design) since she stated that artwork and other visual elements “are important ... but it’s the content” what matters most.

The interviewee does not relate the evaluation process to the school’s mission statement, the department’s objectives and the course-syllabus. She explained that pre- and post-reading tasks should “not necessarily” be in accordance with the course’s objectives. By the end of the interview, when she was asked whether she conducted a methodological procedure in the planning of her extensive reading lessons, the teacher answered that she followed “not a specific order”.

The interview aided me identify the strengths and weaknesses that the teacher had with reference to the subject under investigation. I focused on the latter for the design of the content and reflection tasks of the training sessions provided to the teacher. Thus, I found it relevant to relate my investigation to her training on the following topics: 1. Curriculum planning: The school’s mission statement and the primary English department goals; 2. A general criterion for the evaluation of extensive reading materials; 3. The visual design of these materials; and 4. The steps within an extensive reading lesson. The design of the training program can be found in Appendix C.

#### 4.2. Results obtained during the teacher’s training course

During May, June and July, 2005, I provided the teacher with theoretical information in the format of a training course on “The evaluation and use of extensive reading materials”. The design of such a course can be found in Appendix C. As a result, the teacher summarized the most relevant points of the theoretical background in the completion of reflection tasks and made an evaluation as work-plan of the book “The Secret Garden”.



The following is a descriptive summary of the teacher's responses on the reading and reflection tasks during the training course. Some of these responses coincide with her answers to the interview questions or are literal pieces of information extracted from the readings that she was expected to do whereas other responses come out of her own reflections during the course. The complete version of these tasks can be found in Appendix D.

The teacher analyzed the school's mission statement with reference to the general and specific objectives of the primary English department. She found that the statement focused on attitude goals whereas the department put more emphasis on content goals. In her view, both types of goals are as important in extensive reading in primary teaching. However, she emphasized that by reading extensively, children "are no longer learning for their own sake but in order to extend their learning horizons in a holistic way" (Appendix D). With specific reference to attitude goals, the teacher identified that reading extensively gave students the possibility of:

- a- Sharing experiences to establish closer bonds among themselves and between the group and the teacher;
- b- Developing self-assurance when they could identify with stories about families and friends such as in "The Secret Garden"; and
- c- Intensifying their sensitivity and helping them in the process of growing up when they are exposed to issues such as loss, death, friendship, etc., for example, in the book above mentioned.

Also, the teacher evaluated the story as work-plan. On the reflection sheet that she completed (Appendix D), she summarized that she had evaluated the book in the following way:

- 1- The purpose of the material is clearly defined;
- 2- The proportion of language given is economic;
- 3- The story is interesting;
- 4- The reading tasks proposed are meaningful; and

- 5- The book gives her scope to present pre- and post- reading tasks which promote the personal involvement of the learners in the reading process, as claimed by the school's mission statement.

The teacher enlarged the list of reading objectives as proposed in the training course (Appendix D) and attributed specific importance to “reading beyond the lines”. She clarified the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 reading skills (Appendix D) and provided a list of reading tasks that she herself conducted in her reading lessons. As interestingly, the participant-teacher stated that she would include in the reading objectives of her course-work the one of “enabling students to develop the ability to read critically (Appendix D) and found the use of supplementary material very relevant to reading lessons (Appendix D).

On referring to the steps within an extensive reading lesson (Appendix D), the teacher wrote “...I apply these steps in my reading lesson, but not in a complete or orderly way ... But it all depends on the groups of students, sometimes I have to adapt these steps to my own teaching situation... I have often found that inventing tasks by responding to children's needs and suggestions as they are reading is the most successful approach.” She admitted that, through the investigative project, she learnt how to evaluate materials-as-work-plan more formally since, so far, she had done so on the grounds of personal intuition or previous experiences that she herself or some colleagues had had with the materials.

Furthermore, the teacher was able to make an analysis of the visual design of the story, which she had never made on this book or other readers. Such an analysis can also be found in Appendix D. On the one hand, she found that:

1. The story is of easy access and friendly to both teacher and learners;
2. The density and variety of the text is at the students' right level;
3. The covers of the book are colourful; and

4. The choice of black and white colours in the photographs has its own purpose; i.e. they complement the story and highlight the main character's emotional mood.

On the other hand, the teacher pointed out that:

- 1- The story is not divided into chapters, which does not make pupils get the idea very easily where some of its parts start and others finish, and makes it difficult for the teacher to organize the reading;
- 2- The photographs are not of a particularly good quality;
- 3- There is not sufficient variety of design that can interest students;
- 4- There are no unifying elements on the pages;
- 5- The location of the page numbers is not consistent; and
- 6- The typographical and design conventions do not indicate clearly what is happening and they are not used consistently.

#### 4.3. The findings during the implementation phase of the materials

##### a. Results of the teacher's lesson planning:

The teacher modified the order of the methodological procedure of her reading lessons. She followed the order prescribed by Harmer (1991) and presented during the training course. Thus, she divided her lessons into three steps: Lead-in, reading and post-reading stages.

Likewise, the teacher introduced tasks in her lesson planning that she had either conducted for the first time or implemented differently from the order prescribed. Firstly, she focused her procedure on presenting the students with prediction activities which could be later confirmed or not in the comprehension tasks conducted at the post-

reading stage. Evidence of such a procedure can be found in the most salient parts of the teacher's planning of lessons 4, 5 and 6 in Appendix E.

Secondly, at the outset of the series of reading lessons, the teacher presented the learners with two activities which involved the students in having a broad view of what the story was going to be about. These two activities are: 1. Read about the author from the back cover of the book and complete a chart about the writer's name, nationality, age, famous stories s/he wrote and, 2. Overview the photographs of the book and predict what will happen in the story. Both tasks can be found in the planning of lesson 1 in Appendix E.

Thirdly, at the comprehension-task phase of her lessons, the teacher presented the group with questionnaires based on reading literally and between and beyond the lines. Examples of these can be found in lessons 1, 3 and 4 in Appendix E.

Fourthly, the participant-teacher implemented the so-called by Harmer (1991) "Text-related tasks"; i.e. activities conducted at the end of reading lessons in which the students had to make a production of their own by recreating the content and the language used in the reading experiences. Examples of this type of tasks are:

1. Complete a chart and find similarities and differences between Mary and Colin; account for these similarities and differences (Lesson 4, Appendix E),
2. Guided role-playing (Lesson 5, Appendix E),
3. Complete a "Story elements" form (Lesson 6, Appendix E), and
4. Reaching-a-consensus activity (Lesson 8, Appendix E).

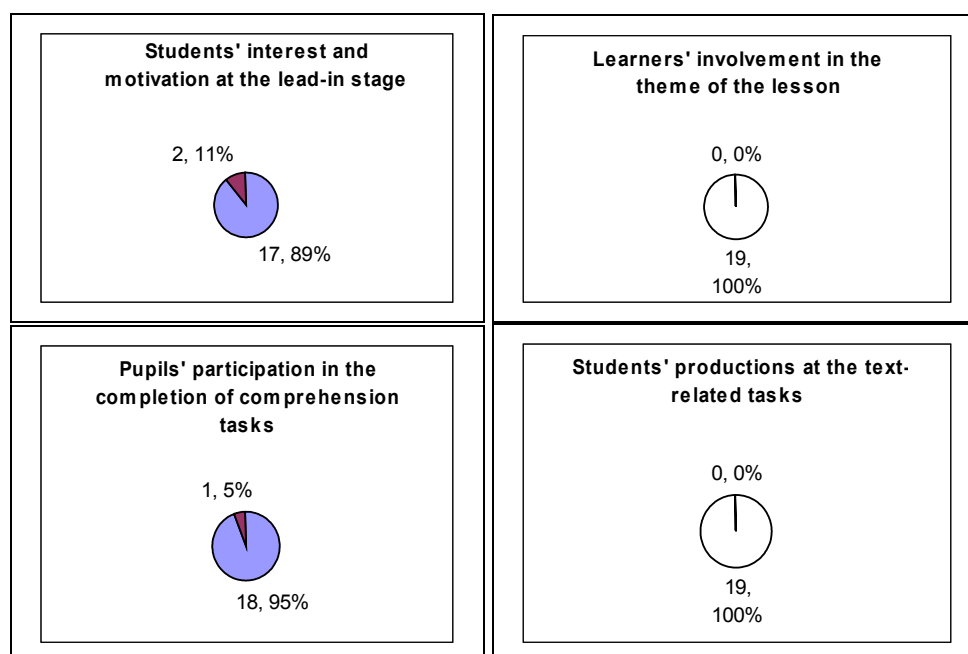
Finally, the teacher presented the Jigsaw reading technique (Lesson 7, Appendix E) for the first time as a means of introducing variety in the use of teaching techniques and of helping the students develop how to work cooperatively; i.e. by retelling the other groups what they had read about and, by interacting when having to answer the questionnaires about their assigned pieces of text.

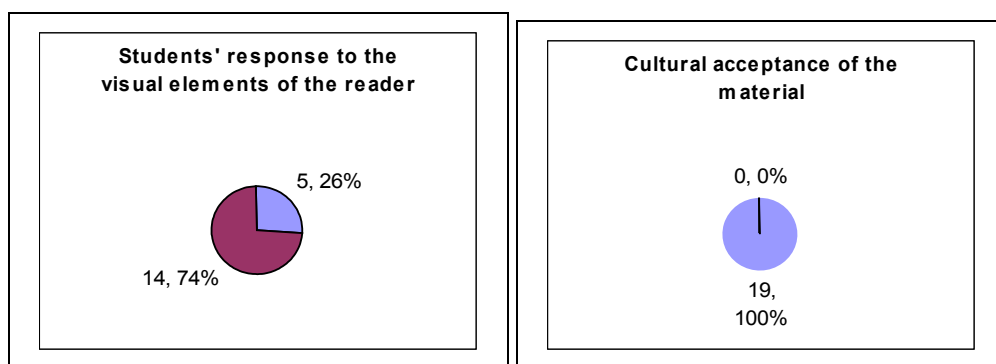
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**b. The evaluation of the materials-in-process:**


I watched the eight lessons in August and September, 2005, during which the teacher implemented the extensive reading material with her class. The results of these observations can be found in Appendix G. The following is an example of such results on lesson 1. The figures before the comma represent the number of students present and those after the comma represent the percentage of positive and negative responses to the material within the total number of students present.

**Lesson 1: Total number of students present: 19**



**Key.**

 Students' negative response to the material

 Students' positive response to the material

I wrote the following observations on the lesson:

“Some of the students can answer the teacher’s questions on the visual elements of the reader because they say they have seen the film but the photographs are not clear enough”.

“At the lead-in the students complete a chart (i.e. name, nationality, age, stories she wrote, etc.) about the author.”

“The teacher requests the students’ opinions through questions such as “How, do you think, Mary felt when she arrived in Yorkshire?”, “Why, did you say, the house was sad?” or “Would you like to live in a house like that? Why? Why not?”, thus encouraging them to read beyond the lines.

These are the teacher’s notes in her diary about the same lesson:

“In general terms the students reacted well on this first lesson; they showed interest and were motivated. Most of them were involved with the theme...It’s a pity that the activity on the photographs couldn’t be carried out successfully because the material was not clear.”

Extracts of the most salient parts of the teacher's diary-writing can be found in Appendix H. I focused on lesson 1 as an example because, in general terms, it summarizes the group of students' responses to each of the categories observed in the scheme. Also, this lesson is one out of two; the other one is lesson 5, in which all the categories could be observed.

Broadly speaking, the students showed interest and were motivated with the tasks proposed at the lead-in stages of each of the eight lessons. Lesson 1 shows 89% of pupils' positive response to the activities together with lesson 7 and this percentage is even higher in lessons 2, 5 and 6 which reach a peak of 100%. Likewise, the theme of the story involved the students positively since the pie indicates high percentages (e.g. 100% in lessons 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6). These percentages coincide with some of my comments and the teacher's of these responses. I wrote, for example, on lesson number 2: "At the lead-in the students are strongly involved with the two activities..." and the teacher noted down in her diary about lesson number 1: "... they showed interest and were motivated" and about lesson number 4: "This was a... motivating class, the students participated, the atmosphere was nice..."

In relation to post-reading tasks of the comprehension and production type, the students also showed a positive response. The pie describing the observation scheme (See Appendix G) highlights percentages of 95% and 100% of such a response in each of the above mentioned types of tasks. However, the group's responses could not be observed in lesson 8 for their participation in the completion of comprehension tasks and in lessons 6 and 7 for the students' productions at text-related tasks. In general terms, the students' found production activities more motivating than comprehension tasks. Evidence of this is found in my own comments when I wrote about lesson number 5: "Good response at the post-reading. The students complete a reaching-a-consensus activity and work on a guided role playing" and about lesson 7: "Their responses decline when they have to answer questions". Also, in her diary, the teacher noted down about lesson 5: "They were very enthusiastic... when they had to role play a situation from the story. But it was not so when they had to answer questions".

c. The evaluation of outcomes-from-the-materials:

After the eight lessons during which the story “The Secret Garden” was used with the group, the teacher asked the students to complete a “Story Evaluation sheet”. A model of this sheet can be found in Appendix I and the results of the findings in Appendix J. As can be observed, the results indicate that 27% of the class scaled the story in 10 points, 6% in 9 points and 32% in 8 points, which sums up a total of 95% of the class who enjoyed reading the story whereas a 5% of the students only scaled the story in 4 points. Evidence of this is found in my notes as an observer when I wrote about lesson 5: “The reading is very involving for the group. The students want to go on reading when the teacher interrupts the task to check whether they can confirm or not their predictions.” and also in the teacher’s diary-notes on lesson 8: “They enjoyed reading the book as they applauded at the end. This always happens when they want to demonstrate their approval”.

With reference to the visual design of the material, 100% of the class found the story was of the appropriate length and 94% of them considered that they read and understood a story better if it is divided into chapters. However, when asked about the photographs of the book, 64% of the learners found that they were not clear enough. I also found this most evidently during lesson 7 when I wrote: “At the post-reading stage the teacher conducts an observation game on the photographs presented in the reader. The students’ positive response is ... low due to the lack of clarity of the material.” Furthermore, the teacher observed on lesson 5: “... the activity on the photographs presented difficulties again because the children couldn’t see them properly.”

Also, the group was asked about the pre- and post-reading tasks that they were expected to complete during the reading lessons. On the one hand, 12 students out of a total of 21 voted for “Multiple Choice” as the task which helped them better understand the message of the story. On the other hand, when the learners were asked about the activities that they mostly enjoyed doing in relation to the story, “Games”, for example, ranked 19 votes and “True/False”, 13. Evidence of this can be found when I observed



about lesson 2: “At the lead-in the students are strongly involved in the ... True/False game” as well as when the teacher observed on lesson 2: “They liked the first part when they were supposed to answer either “True” or “False” and on lesson 3: “The students were particularly motivated when presented with the competition game “Gardens and Houses”. Only 3 students voted for “Questionnaires and Photo Observations”, which coincides with the previously mentioned low positive, response on the students’ parts and their opinions about the photographic elements of the material.

Finally, when asked about whether they would recommend the story to another student, 89% of them responded positively; out of the 21 students present, 65% found the story interesting; 5%, funny; another 5% considered that the message of the story is important and 15% found that it is nice. However, and again considering the total number of students present, 5% would not recommend the story because their friends do not like reading and another 5% did not like the text.

### Conclusion.

In this chapter, I attempted to present the findings that were obtained in the different parts of the project. In the following chapter, I will analyze the results of such findings with the aim of relating them to the research questions posed at the beginning of the investigation.

## **CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will deal with the analysis and interpretation of the findings emanated from the investigation. At the outset, there will be a section related to ethics. As will be detailed in the following parts, the interpretations of the findings will be linked to different aspects of the work. These facets correspond to issues stated in the research questions. Likewise, I will summarize the limitations and implications of the work and I will write a conclusion.

### **5.1. Ethics**

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For the current investigation, I asked the head of the primary English department, Mrs. Susana Gómez, for authorization to carry out my research work. She immediately showed willingness to cooperate and thought that the project would bring about professional development, firstly to the teacher participating in it and, by the end, to the whole primary English staff.

Likewise, I also asked the teacher if she was willing to participate in the investigation. Right from the very beginning she showed enthusiasm towards the work and motivation to cooperate and learn in the process. It was very important to count on the good predisposition of both the head and the teacher since the implementation of the investigative project would somehow change the routine of the classroom. Furthermore, the teacher would have to be ready to work more than normally since she would have to devote time to the interview as well as energy to her participation in the training course, possibly plan her extensive reading lessons in a somewhat different way from the usual one and finally work on the reflection of her own teaching practice.

Also, the teacher's group of students was consulted about the investigation. The teacher introduced me to them explaining that I was carrying out an investigation, describing it briefly to them and asking the group if they were willing to participate. All

of them accepted the proposal; this was very relevant since I had to count on their acceptance for the completion of the work and on their permission to be observed by an agent external to their classroom environment and work.

## 5.2. Do theoretical principles help teachers see the significance of, in this case, the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials?

The evaluation and use of extensive reading materials plays an important role in the teaching of English as a second language. Teachers incorporate a significant “quota” of personal and professional experience in the evaluation and use of these materials. However, it is also essential that they can become familiar with theoretical principles which help them evaluate and use materials appropriately.

Out of the interview conducted to the teacher, it became evident that she had pre-determined ideas on what variables she took into account when evaluating materials for extensive reading purposes. However, first and foremost, the literature in the area considers texts, in Tomlinson’s (1998) terms, as the fundamental aids in ELT classrooms and suggests many more variables than the teacher considered that need to be taken into account in the whole process of evaluating these materials. Firstly, the starting point of these processes is essentially the school’s mission statement. When asked about this statement, the teacher said that she had read it once, some time before, but that she did not take it into consideration on the planning of her lessons, in this particular case, extensive reading lessons; neither did she relate reading experiences to the course’s objectives. White (1988) explains that a school’s mission statement is its “Raison d’etre” and the basis on which the institutions aims and each department’s attitude and content goals are planned. Therefore, it is the school’s mission statement which should set the guidelines for the teacher’s work and permeate itself in the planning of the institutional department’s objectives and activities.

Secondly, the evaluation of the materials cannot be carried out only before their implementation phase. Among several writers, Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) prescribe that an appropriate evaluative procedure of materials should be divided into

three parts: 1. As work-plan; 2. In-process and, 3. Outcomes from materials. As stated by the teacher during the interview, she only conducted the first of these parts but she did not carry it out thoroughly as she failed in taking into consideration factors such as the clarity of the purpose of the materials, the relationship between this purpose and the type of tasks proposed to students, scope for text-related tasks and teachability.

Also, during the first of the three parts into which the evaluation process is divided, the visual design of materials is another key-factor which needs to be taken into account while evaluative decisions are being made. When consulted about this, the teacher listed length, printing and illustrations as influencing factors in her evaluation of materials though she did not expand on explanations about any of them; what made implicit her lack of information on that area. In relation to this, Ellis and Ellis (1987) propose a design criterion for EFL materials that can well be adapted for extensive reading texts in second language teaching and added to the teacher's evaluation criterion. Their outline lists concepts such as relevance to the text and to the audience and the use of colour, and accessibility with reference to clarity of reading path, quality of pages and covers, friendliness to teachers and students and cohesion within the visual elements of the pages and within printing conventions.

Finally, it became clear through the interview that the teacher did not conduct any formal in-process or outcomes-from-materials evaluations. She only made informal observations on her students' responses to the materials and received the comments that they made to her on the content of the reading text. Neither did she register the proportion or percentages of good results of tests on the extensive reading out of the total number of students in her class. Before implementing the materials, the teacher does not involve students in the evaluation process and after the implementation, she does not get feedback from them, either formally or informally.

As regards methodology, the teacher stated in the interview that she did not follow a prescribed order. She explained that she sometimes found it more useful to improvise activities during class-time according to the occasional students' needs and wants and regarded this way of working as "a more successful approach". In fact, she

mixed up the concepts of “tasks” and “approach” in this part of the interview since, as teachers, we can change an activity which has been planned for another which matches more the students’ needs at a particular moment of a lesson. However, the approach; that is, the theoretical principles that underlie the particular way in which we teach, cannot change but out of a thorough reflection on the matter and not because of particular events on a lesson.

Having previously analyzed the important role that the evaluation of materials plays in the process, it becomes clear, then, that the evaluation of extensive reading texts and their use in the classroom cannot be only grounded on educator experience as the interview to the teacher evidences. Interestingly enough, the theory in the area prescribes a number of variables that influence the evaluation of materials and, by no means can they be disregarded as one being more important than the other. Not basing her decisions on theoretical grounds, the teacher gave, for example, more priority to the content of the materials rather than to the visual design. However, in the words of famous illustrators of texts, in chapter 2, illustrations are as important in the whole design of materials as texts themselves. They help focus on a better understanding of the content, speculate on situations, predict conversations and visualize in children’s imagination what a story is about. In sum, they can be the springboard from which interaction over the text is promoted.

Methodologically speaking, a clear guideline should be prescribed about a classroom procedure within extensive reading lessons. Teachers should be clear enough about curriculum planning in relation to the institutional mission statement, the department’s goals and, in this case, the objectives set for extensive reading purposes. Furthermore and, on the basis of these objectives and the sub-skills that learners are expected to develop out of the lessons, careful planning on tasks which match the students’ needs and wants but also the course’s objectives is essential for effective and efficient student and teacher work. In other words, educators should have a broad view on theoretical principles to be able to make evaluations on more and better informed grounds.

The interview itself showed me and the teacher herself her strengths and weaknesses in relation to the topic under investigation. Additionally, it helped me, as already mentioned, identify the main issues on which I designed the training course. It was this series of four training sessions and the reflection tasks that the teacher had to complete during the course that helped her appreciate more the significance of the area in relation to the new information that she got during the sessions.

The reading and reflection tasks of the training course made the teacher focus again on the school's mission statement. For the purpose of completing one of the tasks (Appendix D), she read the statement again and found the relevance of holistic teaching in this writing. This coincided with her own style of teaching since, during the interview and also in the completion of the reflection tasks, she stated that she had found that extensive reading texts gave her the opportunity to present students with materials with potential for conducting "humanistic activities", as called by Moskowitz (1978), or "affective", as termed by Richard-Amato (1988); i.e. tasks which helped learners relate the reading to their own experiences and consequently, perceive the content and focus of extensive reading lessons more integrally.

However, the teacher found out that the use of these so-called humanistic activities was not made explicit in the department's objectives when she had to provide a list of them for the completion of one of the reflection tasks (Appendix D). Also, the reading experience emphasized her view that, by reading extensively, children "are no longer learning for their own sake but in order to extend their learning horizons in a holistic way" (Appendix D). Further, the teacher reviewed attitude goals with reference to the implementation of the story "The Secret Garden" and enumerated these goals (e.g. helping students develop closer bonds among themselves as well as between teacher and students through reading) for further work with the material (Appendix D). Attitude goals are strictly related to a holistic way of teaching and what was implicit in the completion of the tasks related to the first training session was that the teacher did bear in mind the importance of attitude goals in extensive reading and related them to the tasks that she proposed to learners but she did not make it explicit in her contribution to the department's objectives in the annual planning of the course.

On the completion of the reflection tasks corresponding to the second training session, the teacher highlighted the economical use of language of the material because it did not present difficulties, as Bamford and Day (2004) suggest, which cannot make students struggle over the material. She also focused on the clarity of purpose and the potential of the text for the presentation of meaningful tasks, following Rea-Dickins and Germaine's (1992) evaluation criteria, and thought that the text was enjoyable and of interest to the groups of students that she had.

In addition, the teacher found that the book provided students with an insight into another family, a situation which, according to Schickedanz et al. (1993), gives learners the possibility of empathizing with others; i.e. a feeling that children between nine and twelve are beginning to develop. More interestingly, the participant-teacher pointed out that the material was authentic according to the concept cited by Williams and Moran (1989); that is, the authenticity that a text can provide learners with to go beyond the lines and reconstruct the written discourse in line with their experiences. In spite of the strengths of the material that the teacher focused on, she admitted that the book did not have a very attractive appearance (Appendix D) but did not give great relevance to it. Also, at this point, she misused the phrase the "learners' achievements" since she could not present formal percentages or proportions of positive results of students' work but she only referred to the informal commentaries that her last year group made when they had read the material.

During the third training session, the teacher re-emphasized her view on the importance of developing in students the ability to read beyond the lines (Appendix D). It is the latter skill the one that she considered she mostly helped her students develop and for this purpose, she determined that she would include it as "helping students develop the ability to think critically" in the planning of objectives for the extensive reading area of the course for the following academic year. Also, she was able to see the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 skills, as prescribed by Harmer (1991).

Methodologically speaking, the teacher restated the relevance of supplementary materials on the implementation of extensive reading texts and, as also explained in the analysis of the interview, she did not apply a methodological procedure in an orderly and thorough way in her extensive reading lessons as described by Harmer (1991). Once more, she mixed up the concepts of “approach” and “tasks”, which were analyzed earlier on.

As regards her analysis of the visual design of the material during the fourth training session, the teacher found the text of easy accessibility and friendliness to the students and at the right level in terms of density and variety, to mention but a few. However, the participant-teacher found that the text was not divided into chapters and that this hindered the organization of the reading. Further, she focused on the photographs, which were not of good quality, and on the insufficient variety of design. Within the same analysis, it was clear to her that the pages of the material did not have unifying elements and that there was no consistency in the location of page numbers and in the typographical and design conventions.

It is important to restate at this point that the teacher concluded that, though she had identified the above mentioned deficiencies of the materials, she still thought that the content of the book had been, in previous experiences with the text, relevant to students of the age-range (i.e. ten years old) that she dealt with and above all, the written discourse had potential to make students speak and write about topics that went beyond classroom boundaries and helped them develop in the affective and social areas. She insisted on giving more priority to the content of the text rather than to the visual design in an evaluation of materials (Appendix D).

For what has been stated above, the significance of theoretical principles on the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials became clear to the teacher participating in the project in relation to the institution’s mission statement, attitude goals and to aspects of the evaluation criteria, specifically those related to the content of texts. This was so since, through the investigation, she could learn from the process and reflect on her own experience to have a broader view of the subject while reading new



information. In spite of that and, as will be seen further on, it will not be until she observes theoretical principles in practice that she will be able to modify some of her views (e.g. with reference to visual design and methodology) on the area.

### 5.3. Can observation and reflection on pedagogical practices on extensive reading, grounded on theoretical principles, aid educators modify their current classroom work?

In relation to this second question, the interview made to the teacher and the training sessions that she received helped her identify the strengths and weaknesses of the material in question, reflect on her work, see the significance of and enlarge her knowledge on the subject under research. The reading experience for the completion of the reflection tasks was also for the teacher a process of interaction between the texts that she read and herself as a reader and an opportunity for assimilating and accommodating new concepts in her schema of work on extensive reading. In sum, theoretical principles provided her with enough scope to see how significant the evaluation and use of materials is in TESOL and, as will be seen later, how, together with her experience, these principles could be learnt and re-created to turn them, as Freeman (1996) describes, into reconstructed practice for the benefit of student learning.

Though she did not make it explicit on the completion of the reflection tasks, the reading experience during the training sessions gave the teacher the opportunity of choosing to modify the methodological procedure that she had been implementing in extensive reading lessons and introduce different activities, some more complex than others as González Morón, Lanús and Rodríguez Amenábar (2006) point out. Differently from her comments in the completion of the reflection tasks, the teacher highlighted the importance of methodological procedures in her diary-writing. She attributed the interest and involvement of the learners to “the clarity in the development of the class”. She added that, in that lesson, “the activities could be conducted orderly” (Appendix H, Lesson 4). In relation to this, it is worth pointing out that De Vita (2006), in a recent article on the aims of primary education, has highlighted the importance of helping students learn to select, interpret, organize and present information so that learners can build up knowledge autonomously. This would not be possible if an

orderly methodological procedure was not conducted within the lessons. This order, as Harmer (1991) indicates, prescribes the steps by means of which learners can read through and work on the information provided by the text and get the most of the reading experience.

Out of the observation of her planning, it comes to be clear that she divided most of her lessons into three distinct steps: Lead-in, reading and post-reading stages and conducted prediction activities as an innovation at the beginning of most of the reading sessions; thus, emphasizing the importance attributed by the theory in the area to the development of prediction skills in a stage prior to the reading itself and the further confirmation or not of those predictions (Appendix E, Lesson 4). Likewise, she made a point of presenting the students with questionnaires for which they had to read literally, between and beyond the lines (Appendix E, Lesson 1), as prescribed by Bamford and Day (2004), and of conducting text-related tasks at the end of the lessons, which involved the students in making productions over the content and work of the reading experiences (Appendix E, Lesson 4). Finally, the presentation of the Jigsaw reading technique was a new opportunity to make the students work cooperatively through interaction.

But the analysis and use of the book “The Secret Garden” did not finish in the evaluation of materials-as-work-plan. The implementation of the text made both the teacher and myself observe the students’ reactions and responses to the material. These observations helped her analyze the changes introduced and clarify, up to what extent, the strengths and weaknesses of the book were relevant to the effective and efficient implementation of the material.

According to the data extracted from my observation scheme and comments as well as from the teacher’s diary-noting, the group responded very well to the material. In chapter 4, a sample of the observation scheme, the teacher’s and my own comments on lesson 1 were registered. This lesson was an example of a trend that, to a large extent, persisted throughout the eight (8) lessons during which the material was implemented.

In spite of the evidence observed and the theoretical principles read, the teacher planned other activities based on the visual elements accompanying the text in subsequent lessons (e.g. lessons 5 and 7) and in each of these cases the results showed a poor response on the students' parts in relation to the photographs of the book because of the poor quality of the material. The Parkers (1991) and House (1997) focus on the importance of illustrations to promote children's understanding of texts, especially, as Morgan Bowen (1982) states, in those students who are more visually- than text-oriented. Likewise, Wright (1989) describes illustrations as the springboard for making learners practise speaking, an activity that could not be carried out successfully by the teacher because of the poor quality of the visual elements.

The materials and their use in class were also evaluated by the group of students, as prescribed by Bamford and Day (2004) among others. This enlarged and completed the observations that the teacher and myself made during the implementation phase. The learners expressed their opinions on a "Story Evaluation sheet", which they completed after reading the text.

In her final comments, however, the teacher was able to review some of her previous ideas on the material. By the end of her participation in the project and having analyzed the results extracted by means of the data-collecting methods, she made it explicit that the next time that she implemented the book "The Secret Garden" due to the general acceptance that the material had among the group, she would use the video-tape of the film to overcome the problem of the lack of clarity of the photographic elements of the text. Thus, she understood, on her final reflection, the relevance of visual elements in the development of extensive reading lessons. She determined that she would not follow the same criteria that she used in the past for evaluation purposes. She would definitely take into consideration all the factors involved in this process according to the readings that were presented to her during the training sessions. Finally, she made a point of stating that, out of the experience of working in the project, she had learnt to plan her extensive reading lessons in an orderly way and added that she had found the methodological procedure suggested by Harmer (1991) "more

practical, economical, useful and attractive to ...students” (Appendix H, Final comments).

Thus, the teacher herself in her final comments gave the answer to the second research question. The work prior to the implementation of the material enlarged her knowledge on the subject, helped her see the relevance of the topic and made her reflect on the teaching experience that she had at work. Some preliminary conclusions were extracted from this phase of the project, for example, from what was related to the visual design of the materials, but those conclusions were by no means exhaustive. The implementation of the text, the observations of the responses and reactions of the learners, the information about the learners’ opinions of the material and further reflections on her own practice, made the teacher review what she had done in her classroom in the extensive reading area up to that moment and some of her views during the training sessions. She did not discard the way in which she implemented her lessons but the investigative experience gave her the possibility of choosing in what way her work could be done better. Thus and, as stated above, she determined that she would enlarge her evaluation-of-materials criteria, modify her methodological procedure and supplement the use of the visual elements of the story with the video-tape of the film in a further implementation of the book.

#### 5.4. Limitations of the research work

For the current investigation, I selected the case-study approach since it could provide me with new insights and information into my work by making a part of it “alive”. The case-study was a very specific experience, out of which I was able to extract concrete facts from the writing of the literature review as well as from the actual implementation of the project with the teacher and her students. It showed a three-dimensional overview by picturing the relationships among the teacher, the group of students and the material in the micro-situation of an educational institution and up to what extent the topic itself was significant in the teaching of English and influenced the practice of the teacher participating in the context of the experience.

However, it is important to point out, firstly, that a case-study such as the one in question cannot be submitted to construct validity because the subjectivity of the observers (i.e. the teacher and myself) and the students could bias the study. Secondly, internal validity could also have been at risk because the teacher and myself as observers could be in danger of not actually observing what we intended to observe. For example, we might have failed in finding causal relationships, which could be shown in the presentation of the material to the students and their responses and reactions to it. To overcome this drawback, we intended to register, as already mentioned, different facets of the students at work in the observation scheme and also the initial learners' reactions and responses to the material since factors inherent to the classroom but irrelevant to the investigation could have biased the interpretation of the findings. Likewise, the methods of data-collection such as the interview, the observation scheme and the questionnaire were piloted and tested to have it clear that, through the methods, I was asking the questions that I wanted to ask and the other participants were expressing the concepts that they wanted to convey.

Thirdly, the case-study approach cannot be regarded as entirely reliable though different views on the same implementation of the work were taken into account such as the teacher's, the students' and my own. Clearly, another observer, external to the investigation, could have been asked to act to impinge, in this way, more reliability to the project. Finally, in terms of Bell (1987), the study faces relatability risks. This is so since I cannot possibly state if the research approach selected provided appropriate and sufficient details that could be related to other teachers and students working with the same material in similar situations. This case was a series of instances based only on the particular planning of a teacher with a particular group of students working on lockstep extensive reading; i.e. one of the possible ways in which the experience could have been carried out. Other teachers may have different backgrounds on which to build up knowledge about the reading experiences and tasks proposed during the training sessions and about the reflection work on the actual implementation. Also, different groups of students who, though the topic of the material is at the right level of ten-year-old learners' linguistic competence and their knowledge of the world, could produce different responses, reactions and interpretations on the same materials.

### 5.5. Implications of the research work

The current investigation provided a more detailed account for the primary English staff on how to evaluate and use extensive reading materials in class. This account was presented in a teacher-development session conducted primarily by the teacher participating in the project and assisted by myself as an observer of the experience. During this teacher-development session, carried out in December, 2005, the teacher presented her experience and described the results and conclusions of her work. In addition, the primary English staff was asked about their own experiences with extensive reading materials and contributed to the project with their opinions and ideas on the topic. All of them agreed on the implementation of Harmer's (1991) methodological procedure to conduct more efficient and effective extensive reading lessons in the future. Likewise, the staff worked on the expansion of an outline for materials evaluation purposes, which included:

- a) Scope for learners' own choice of extensive reading materials, out of two or three options,
- b) The students' background experiences: Consideration of their past life situations for the evaluation of themes which might affect individual learners' emotions, and
- c) Evaluation of topics of extensive reading materials which could be integrated to the study of other areas of the L2 curricula.

### Conclusion

In the following chapter, I will complete the investigation by writing my conclusions on the project. Thus, I will summarize the main findings emanated from

the work, present some studies carried out in the field in relation to the subject and describe some directions for further research.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will re-state the answers to the research questions already initiated in the previous chapter and will also present some studies related to the subject under investigation. Finally, I will describe some area of research that I would like to continue investigating about and write some final words on the work itself.

#### **6.1. Answers to the research hypothesis and questions**

In the current investigation, I attempted to try out that a theory-based exploration on the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials is conducive to a more appropriate implementation of these materials. At the outset of the project, the reading that I carried out on the subject provided me with a sufficient amount of information which stated the relevance of the project. Thinking reading in terms of a school's mission statement, of content but also of attitude goals in relation to a course is conducive to set teachers' practices into a broader context than that of the classroom. This helps educators contextualize their work at a macro level within the institution in which they work and direct it towards the school's goals whereas, at a micro level, their practices should aim at matching the institutional goals with the tasks to be proposed and the learners' needs and wants.

Daily practices then include both an appropriate evaluation of materials for extensive reading programmes as well as a careful planning of the lessons. To be able to work on this effectively, teachers need to consult an outline which defines the criteria for the evaluation process not only with reference to the content of the texts but with the visual design of the materials as well. In addition, they should be required to know

detailed information about the subskills that they can help their students develop through reading and, finally, perceive that the design of extensive reading lessons with the planning of text-related tasks can be a challenge for learners to recreate the reading experience with a production of their own.

Having seen the importance of extensive reading in TESOL, the research work could not have been concluded if, beyond the information obtained for the investigation, I had not attempted to see the relevance of the theory in the actual practice. I wanted to find out if theoretical principles help teachers see the significance of the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials, and also consider if observation and reflection on pedagogical practices on extensive reading, grounded on theoretical principles, can aid educators modify their current classroom work.

Consequently, I interviewed one of the primary teachers of English in the institution to know about her evaluation criteria and use of extensive reading materials in class. During the interview, she attributed a major significance to the development of the extensive reading skill. However, the teacher's answers reflected her strengths and weaknesses in relation to the theory on the area and, on the basis of the latter, I designed a training course which could provide her with more information.

Thus, the teacher was able to perceive, through the course, the relevance of the subject on issues such as the strict relationship of the school's mission statement, content and attitude goals with her daily teaching practice. Likewise, she saw the importance attributed by the literature in the field to the content and linguistic information of texts as well as to the visual design of materials. Finally, she learnt that extensive reading lessons can be designed in an orderly way for the efficiency of teacher work and the effectiveness of student learning. Additionally, the reading and training on the topic made her see up to what extent her background ideas could be enhanced and enriched by the new concepts incorporated to the subject and then, how both previous and updated knowledge could be translated into innovation in her daily work.



As stated, the teacher did not disregard the work that on extensive reading she had been doing up to that moment. It was this work the basis on which she built up further information and practice. Thus, she added to the criteria that she had on the evaluation of extensive reading texts variables such as the purpose of the materials and the relationship of this purpose with the tasks to be proposed during the reading lessons as well as the whole issue on the visual elements that accompany texts, to mention but a few. In addition, she modified her teaching procedure by giving more importance to developing in her students prediction skills at the pre-reading stage and to the presentation of text-related tasks at the post-reading step of the lessons. All these changes together with her previous work on the subject were considered in her pre-, while- and post-evaluations of the materials and the whole experience itself. The implementation of the project made her reflect even more on her own work, share it with the rest of the staff and add to the investigation the contributions that the other teachers made on their own practices in the classroom with extensive reading materials and more variables that they included to be taken into consideration in materials evaluation processes. In sum, the experience demonstrated both the teacher and myself that observation and reflection on classroom-practices, on the basis of related theory, helped modify teaching experiences.

Finally, a theory-based exploration on the evaluation and use of extensive reading materials facilitated that the teacher participating in the investigation could have a new insight into a book that she had used extensively. As mentioned above, she analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the materials, was able to see, in the actual implementation and in the feedback given by the students, how these strengths and weaknesses were revealed and came to realize that an orderly planning of the lessons had a positive impact on the students' classroom-work. Consequently, the theoretical principles that she acquired during the training sessions, the reflection tasks on the readings and her actual work certainly determined that she would introduce changes in her teaching practice with reference to a more appropriate evaluation and implementation of extensive reading materials in the course of the development of the project and thinking of her work for the following academic year.

Dougill (1987:32), citing “The Lord of the Rings”, describes that at a certain moment, “... Gandalf and Frodo come to a fork in the path they are following. Frodo turns to Gandalf and asks which is the right way. “Perhaps there is no right way”, replies Gandalf.” In this phrase an analogy is found with language teaching because the teaching of a language is full of choices and it is teachers those who have to make these choices. On making that selection, they count on their training, knowledge and experience. To Dougill (1987:33), “the key element here is informed opinion”. And so did the teacher participating in this project. She learnt new information and related it to her own experience. In the end, she got the expertise necessary to make her teaching practice, as she herself stated, more effective for her students’ learning.

## 6.2. Related studies in the educational field

Studies in the area of extensive reading are many and various. Out of a wide amount of such studies, Bell (2006:8) reports on one carried out in Hong Kong secondary schools. Though the current investigation did not set up a reading program, the benefits of the study above mentioned help to see how theoretically-based principles produced different aspects of effectiveness in the implementation of such a program. The study persuaded on its effectiveness, especially in relation to learners’ language development. It focused that such a program could “provide very effective platforms for promoting ... development from elementary levels upwards” and added that it did “require a significant investment in time, energy and resources on the part of those charged with managing the materials ...”

As regards comprehension, it is also Bell (2006) who concludes that research shows that extensive reading program instructors utilizing attractive, high-interest stories obtain great improvement in comprehension. In addition, Mason (2006:1) writes that investigations prove that extensive reading programs at beginning and intermediate levels show “better gains” for readers “in reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and writing.”

With reference to interaction promoted through text-related tasks, Jacobs and Gallo (1997) report on a study with fourth-graders in the United States. They tried to test the value of combining extensive reading with peer interaction. Both researchers found out that those students who interacted with each other through reading texts, outperformed learners who either did not read extensively or did not complete follow-up activities after reading extended texts. In addition, those students who benefited from the experience exchanged their enthusiasm for reading, were more competent in helping others to learn and had an opportunity to share what they had read.

Susser and Robb (1990:1) summarize what extensive reading contributes to teaching lessons. They state that “because students do not spontaneously apply the skills presented in skill lessons, instruction and activities to encourage the development of and automatic use of comprehension skills must be incorporated into daily instruction.” The above mentioned investigators have found that research shows evidence that extensive reading procedures comprise this type of activity.

### 6.3. Directions for further research

A related direction for further research in the context of TESOL will be that of cooperative learning. This topic can be defined as a tool for enhancing and expanding learner-learner interaction. Jacobs and Gallo (1997) point out that the cooperative learning approach has a history dating back more than one-hundred years ago and is supported by areas such as psychology, social-psychology, sociology and education. The investigation proved that there were instances in the project through which both teacher and students in fact worked or could have worked in cooperation together. Firstly, learners could have been presented with a series of materials, asked to make their own evaluation and thus helped cooperate in the process. Secondly, it is learners who, on having read the text, expressed their opinions on the materials and tasks also contributing to a great extent to the evaluation that the teacher made of the book and influencing on the decisions to be taken about the material in the future. Lastly, but not less important, the fact that learners worked cooperatively in the reading process

through the jigsaw reading technique and/or their participation in the cooperative management of text-related tasks makes the subject of cooperation one of interest for further research.

However, the description of new directions for investigation in the area of cooperation is not limited to the work of teachers in class-rooms but extends to their relationships with colleagues and with the cooperative work that institutional leaders can generate in their staffs. In the particular situation of South America, studies such as that reported in Torrington (1994:40) demonstrate that some Latin American countries, Argentina was on the list, “are likely to produce forms of organization that rely heavily on hierarchy and clear orders from superiors”. This investigative project was a clear instance that demonstrated that working cooperatively, in this case, the teacher and myself and both of us with the rest of the primary educators, can produce new associations of work that benefit not only institutions and staffs but student development as well.

The current investigation contributed greatly to my professional development. It provided me with knowledge of teaching in relation to the area of extensive reading and made me value the opportunity of working with a colleague. But more importantly, I came to understand that children’s learning is all the staff’s business. Such a huge matter cannot be left in the hands of one single person; maybe the head or individual teachers. In pedagogical as well as in managerial terms, it is the “work-together” on theory and practice and practice and theory of all the staff-members, disregarding individual positions, which can promote effectiveness in schools’ practices.

#### 6.4. Final words

The area of extensive reading in L1 has been given importance in the 2006 guidelines for the province’s reading programme. Access to literary texts, the relationship between the written discourse and the accompanying visual elements, and teacher-training in the evaluation and implementation of materials have been some of the main issues addressed by the official document. It is expected that this emphasis on

extensive reading in L1 can be extended to L2 and FL programmes since the teaching of another language apart from the mother tongue is included as compulsory in the primary curriculum of the province. Education authorities will necessarily have to work on this even more in these days when a world in constant change will need, in the near future, students who can enlarge their knowledge of the world through their native as well as another language. The question can, in spite of official decisions, also be addressed locally. According to the Extensive Reading principles enumerated by Day and Bamford (2004) it is teachers in their classrooms, those who can take the lead into initiating the process of implementing extensive reading materials in an L2 or FL, facilitate students' work in relation to it and start to set the wheel at work.

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### **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** Sample of the questionnaire used during the interview.

**Appendix B:** Extracts from the most significant parts of the interview to the teacher participating in the project.

**Appendix C:** Detailed report on the contents, reflection tasks and bibliography used during the training sessions.

**Appendix D:** Formal analysis as work-plan of the book “The Secret Garden” and reflection tasks completed by the teacher during the training course.

**Appendix E:** Extracts from the most salient parts of the teacher’s lesson-planning.

**Appendix F:** Observation Scheme.

**Appendix G:** Results and comments obtained from the Observation Scheme.

**Appendix H:** Extracts of the most significant parts of the teacher’s diary-writing.

**Appendix I:** Story Evaluation Sheet.

**Appendix J:** Results obtained from the Story Evaluation Sheet.

**Appendix A: Sample of the questionnaire used during the interview**

**Date of interview:** April, 2005

**Name of interviewee:** Mrs. Guillermino

**Venue:** School library

**Department:** Primary English department

**Topic:** Evaluation and use of extensive reading materials.

**Questions and prompts**

1. What is the general process of evaluating a “reader” like?
  - ✓ Do you evaluate the readers that you intend to use with your group of students? Are they assigned to you by the primary English Department head or by some external authority?
  - ✓ When do you initiate this process? At the beginning of the school year? At the end of the year previous to the implementation of the material? After you get to know your students? Do you wait for the evaluation until you know which are the characteristics of your group of students, their likes and interests, their linguistic strengths and weaknesses?
  - ✓ Do you involve your students in the process of evaluating a “reader”? Do you request them to evaluate the material once they have used it?
  - ✓ Do you attend presentations, workshops or seminars during the process?
  - ✓ Do you share the process with a colleague/colleagues? Do you consult the teachers who have already had your group to see whether the material you intend to propose has been used with the target group?
  - ✓ Do you talk with peer-teachers who may be a good source of informed evaluative comment on materials?
  - ✓ Do you base your criterion of materials evaluation on previous knowledge and experiences you have had with “readers” and other groups of students?
  - ✓ Do you use guides for evaluating “readers”?
  
2. What are the general characteristics of a “good reader”?
  - ✓ Do you consider that the material should be the most appropriate given the aims of the syllabus? Do you take into account that the “reader” can be integrated with any of the topic-areas to be dealt with during the year?
  - ✓ What kind of topics are children of the age-range between 6 and 12 years old generally interested in?
  - ✓ What about the outer presentation of the material?

- ✓ How long should a “reader” be?
3. Which are the specific details to focus on in the evaluation of a reader?
- ✓ Do you read reading reviews that appear in professional journals?
  - ✓ Do you read the introduction and the blurb of the reader?
4. Do you take into account the visual design, printing and artwork on evaluating a reader?
- ✓ Is the visual design of a reader important to you? Why?
  - ✓ Does “good design” attract attention and arouse interest?
  - ✓ Have you ever turned away from a product because you did not like its appearance?
  - ✓ What should the visual elements on the pages be like?
  - ✓ How is unity on a page identified?
  - ✓ What is appropriate for a page as regards its visual elements?
  - ✓ In what way is consistency shown?
  - ✓ How is balanced considered?
  - ✓ To what extent is printing important in the visual design of a page?
  - ✓ What about the size and style of the print?
  - ✓ Do you consider how important artwork (i.e. photographs, illustrations, charts and graphs) can be when evaluating a reader?
  - ✓ Do you focus on the relevance of artwork to the text?
  - ✓ How essential is it that the artwork of a text is culturally acceptable to students of your country?
  - ✓ What about the front/back covers? Should they be easily manageable?
5. Which genres of readers do you consider evaluating for your groups?
- ✓ Have you ever used a collection of short stories?
  - ✓ Detective/horror tales?
  - ✓ What is the role that you assign to authentic materials for extensive reading?
6. In the process of evaluating a reader, do you also think of the pre- and post-reading tasks that you will intend to propose to your students?
- ✓ Do you consider that these tasks are supplementary material?
  - ✓ Do you integrate them as part of the reading process?

- ✓ Do you evaluate a reader positively if it provides teachers with pre- and post-reading tasks?
- ✓ If these tasks are not provided, do you design them yourself or do you look for other sources?
- ✓ Do you also take into account that they should be in accordance with the course's objectives and the school's mission statement?
- ✓ What is the methodological procedure that you follow in the presentation of reading tasks?

7. Which, do you think, are your strengths and weaknesses in the process of evaluating a reader?

- ✓ Do you take into account general principles on evaluating reading materials?
- ✓ Which are the issues you would like to focus on to get theoretical information on how to evaluate a reader appropriately?

**Appendix B: Extracts from the most significant parts of the interview to the teacher participating in the project**

The following is the transcript of the most significant extracts of the interview:

**Interviewer:** The topic of this interview is “The evaluation and use of extensive reading materials in primary teaching”. What, do you think, is the general criterion for evaluating a reader?

**Interviewee:** Well ... several aspects ... I will tell you what I think and what I usually do ... First I ... take into account children’s age and interests ... experience.

**Interviewer:** Your own experience?

**Interviewee:** My *own* experience, yes ... it all depends on the groups ... I try to look for books which have the tenses they already know.

**Interviewer:** So the idea is ... that you take the syllabus into account. The reader is not a piece of material that is completely isolated from the syllabus you’re going to deal with during the year.

**Interviewee:** No, no ... More or less I take into account the grammar level. Most of the times I think of “tenses” ... But what I usually think of ... more often is what? ... If they have “Simple Present” and “Simple Past”, for example; it’s useful ... “Tenses” need ... more practice.

**Interviewer:** O.K. That’s right. It’s interesting. So the idea is ... that you take your students’ linguistic level into account.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Apart from their likes and dislikes and the topics they may be familiar with.

**Interviewee:** Yes ...

**Interviewer:** ... and their age.

**Interviewee:** And the topics they’re interested in.

**Interviewer:** Great.

**Interviewee:** For example, ten/eleven-year-old children tend to be interested in horror stories, in ... well or ... some other kinds of stories in which they can feel identified. That's why ...

**Interviewer:** For example?

**Interviewee:** For example, this year ... I ... I've chosen "Free Willy" and "The Secret Garden".

**Interviewer:** Nice stories.

**Interviewee:** Both stories ... er ... in both stories children take part ... so the students feel identified with the characters.

**Interviewer:** Good!

**Interviewee:** They ... they can ... I don't know ... They can imagine that perhaps they ... they can play the characters' situations and all that.

**Interviewer:** What is the role that you assign to authentic materials for extensive reading?

**Interviewee:** I think it is very important ... I introduce this type of material from time to time ... some magazine or newspaper articles ... Another thing that I think it's important to take into account nowadays is "Availability in the market".

**Interviewer:** This is true (Smiles) Because of the currency and import problems and drawbacks that we may have in Argentina.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And ... another point is stories in which they can perceive the characters' feelings and emotions ... so most of the stories I choose have something to do with emotions.

**Interviewer:** So you have an integral teaching profile.

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** Your approach is not only based on the teaching and practice of grammar and vocabulary but also on the possibility that your students can express what they feel about the reading ...

**Interviewee:** That's it.

**Interviewer:** ... and what their opinions are.

**Interviewee:** Not only is the plot important here so ... but the expression of feelings as well.

**Interviewer:** How interesting!

**Interviewee:** Yes ... er ... so ... through this the students can draw conclusions, predict ... and imagine endings because at the beginning perhaps ... looking at the cover pictures or whatever they can predict, the whole plot or the story itself and ... through feelings they can, for example, act episodes out, or make dialogues ...

**Interviewer:** Good.

**Interviewee:** Well ... then ... another thing that I take into account is that the students can imagine colours, and also the types of letters, length, the length of the book ... I think these points are important.

**Interviewer:** Have you always used short books? Have you ever tried a collection of short stories?

**Interviewee:** No, always short books.

**Interviewer:** Right. So you have already answered some of the questions that I wanted to ask you... er ... do you select the readers or are they assigned to you? Or, do you have to use certain readers because they are imposed by external authorities administering international examinations?

**Interviewee:** No, no ... lately ... these five years let's say ... these last *five* years ... we ... we can choose the material. This year precisely ... er ... the books I'm using have supplementary materials like a video, cassettes and all that so ... it's much better.

**Interviewer:** So ... do you take into account that the product can have supplementary materials before selecting it?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And pre- and post-reading tasks as well?

**Interviewee:** Yes, usually ... generally ... I usually do ... pre-, while- and after-reading tasks.

**Interviewer:** All right. And ... if the reader doesn't provide with that kind of material, do you design it yourself?

**Interviewee:** Yes.



**Interviewer:** Right ... er ... when do you initiate this process of evaluating a reader? At the beginning of the year? At the end of the year previous to the one in which the reader will be implemented? After you get to know your students?

**Interviewee:** Most of the times at the beginning of the year.

**Interviewer:** Yes ... after you get to know the group ...

**Interviewee:** The group I'm going to have ... yes.

**Interviewer:** Do you involve the students in the process of evaluating readers? Have you ever involved them?

**Interviewee:** No.

**Interviewer:** No. All right.

**Interviewee:** That would be interesting...

**Interviewer:** Do you consult colleagues or ...

**Interviewee:** ... when I have the opportunity I do (Smiles).

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Not now ... but ...

**Interviewer:** O.K.

**Interviewee:** Yes ... for example last year we worked in a group with another teacher ... yes ... but not this year.

**Interviewer:** And d'you consult the teachers who have already had your group to see if the material that you're going to use this year has already been used in previous years?

**Interviewee:** Oh, yes, always.

**Interviewer:** Great. Do you attend book presentations, exhibitions, seminars when trying to evaluate a reader?

**Interviewee:** I go to book-stores ...

**Interviewer:** All right ... Er ... Talking about the syllabus again ... D'you think that, d'you consider that the reader should be related to the topics you're going to deal with during the year, not only with the grammar points? But also with the topics you're going to deal with?

**Interviewee:** In this case, I would say "Yes".

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Interviewee:** Because “Free Willy” is the story of a whale and in module 1, for example, we’re dealing with animals.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Interviewee:** Different kinds of animals so that ... but not in the second reader we’re going to use.

**Interviewer:** All right. Good! ... What about the general characteristics of a reader? What should a “good reader” be like? For example, in terms of length or the students’ age-range ...

**Interviewee:** So it’s important the age-range and the length ... The younger the students are, the shorter the books should be...

**Interviewer:** And the outer presentation of the material?

**Interviewee:** D’you mean the covers?

**Interviewer:** Yes!

**Interviewee:** Colouring?

**Interviewer:** Yes!

**Interviewee:** Well ... it’s always attractive to have colourful covers and photographs but ... not as a general rule because, for example, I used a book which has black and white photographs and my last year students were delighted so ...

**Interviewer:** ... so it’s the content what they liked.

**Interviewee:** The content, yes ... in that case.

**Interviewer:** Now talking specifically about the information that books bring with them or general information about them, do you read reading reviews in journals, in teachers’ journals, for example, to see what they are about, what new products are available?

**Interviewee:** (Thinks) Ah, yes, yes. When I receive the publishers’ catalogues, I usually read them.

**Interviewer:** O.K.

**Interviewee:** As we’re always in the ... in the look for books, it’s necessary.

**Interviewer:** All right. And before evaluating a reader, do you read the introduction and the blurb?

**Interviewee:** (Smiles) Always.

**Interviewer:** Always. O.K. Good! ... Let's talk about the visual design of a reader. Do you focus your attention on the visual elements, the artwork, the printing of a book?

**Interviewee:** (Thinks) Well ... if it's a very attractive book, attractive as regards its colours and ... printing and all that ... the text attracts my attention.

**Interviewer:** All right. But ... have you ever turned away from a product because you didn't like its appearance?

**Interviewee:** (Thinks)

**Interviewer:** Have you ever decided I'm not going to buy this book because I don't like its visual design?

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** Now talking more *specifically* about the visual design and artwork of a reader, do you see that a page has unity, be appropriate to the readers, what about the printing? What do you focus on?

**Interviewee:** (Thinks) The printing.

**Interviewer:** The printing?

**Interviewee:** If it is clear and ... yes ... but not the rest.

**Interviewer:** Not the rest. O.K. And ... what about artwork in the format of photographs, illustrations, charts or graphics? Do you think these are important elements to pay attention to?

**Interviewee:** Yes, they *are* important.

**Interviewer:** Good.

**Interviewee:** Yes, but ... as I've told you before sometimes it's the content ...

**Interviewer:** Yes ... what matters most.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** All right. Er .. What about ... "culture"? Because you know that the content of a reader may be offensive for the students' culture. Do you also think of this when evaluating a reader?

**Interviewee:** Er ... (Thinks) In general terms, I always read it before I present the book to the group of students, of course, but ...

**Interviewer:** You have never found that the content of the books you selected were offensive.

**Interviewee:** No, no.

**Interviewer:** Great. Talking about the pre- and the post-reading tasks that you can conduct when using a reader ...

**Interviewee:** Yes?

**Interviewer:** You said that you *did* take these types of tasks into account when evaluating a reader ... Do you integrate them as part of the reading process?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, you do. They are as important as the reading itself.

**Interviewee:** Yes, always.

**Interviewer:** So ... you evaluate a reader positively if it provides teachers with this kind of tasks.

**Interviewee:** Of course, I do.

**Interviewer:** O.K. Do you consider that these tasks, pre- and post-reading, should be in accordance with the course objectives?

**Interviewee:** No, not necessarily.

**Interviewer:** Not necessarily. Why not?

**Interviewee:** Because if you ... if you're dealing with something completely different from what you're doing in your syllabus, it has nothing to do so ... you can manage perfectly well working with ... (Thinks) ...

**Interviewer:** ... with any kind of material?

**Interviewee:** With any kind of material that does not necessarily achieve these objectives.

**Interviewer:** What is the methodological procedure that you follow in the presentation of reading tasks?

**Interviewee:** Not a specific order. It all depends on the students' needs. I have often found that inventing tasks by responding to children's needs as they are reading is the most successful approach.

**Interviewer:** Have you ever considered ... Do you consider the school's mission statement when curriculum planning? Have you re-read the school's mission statement lately?

**Interviewee:** I read it several years ago.

**Interviewer:** When you have to evaluate the material that you're going to use, in this case "readers", do you take the school's mission into account?

**Interviewee:** No ... no ...

**Interviewer:** The last question now ... which, do you think, are your weaknesses and strengths as regards evaluating and using extensive reading materials?

**Interviewee:** I think that of course there are lots of things to learn and I'd like to ...

**Interviewer:** All right.

**Interviewee:** The results are not bad but ... perhaps they can be a bit better.

**Interviewer:** Good. Well, thank you very much for your time, participation and interest in this work.

**Appendix C: Detailed report on the contents, reflection tasks and bibliography of the training sessions**

**Training Session # 1**

The school's mission statement and the primary English Department goals
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As a starting point, it will be of utmost importance to refer to the “School’s mission statement” which was re-elaborated in the 1980s and focuses on the following guidelines.

This is a translation of such a statement:

“Human beings are called to live in love and justice and create new social models for their partners and to the service of the community. The learning activities derived from these ideals should aim at educating students holistically so that they can exercise their responsibility of doing, thinking and feeling through different types of tasks.”

**For reflection:**

- The term “holistically” appears to be a key word in this statement, what do you think it means?
- What is the relationship between this term and the last part of the statement?
- Which are the primary English department goals? Could you list them?
- Specifically speaking, up to what extent do the reading objectives of the course-work achieve the school’s aim and the department’s objectives?

Halliwell (1992:10) identifies two sorts of goals: Content and attitude goals but puts special emphasis on the latter in primary teaching. It is essential to recognize in her words that “attitude goals relate to the kind of learning experience we set up and the relationships and atmosphere of the language classroom” in all that is referred to the teaching of L2. In other words, it is not enough for students to express their feelings and emotions –which is all right- but that they can do so in the target language:

- Which attitude goals do you promote in your reading lessons?
- Which would you add after reading the extract?

## **Training session # 2**

General criterion for the evaluation of “readers”.
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- a. Read the article entitled “Evaluation”, by Rea- Dickins and Germaine (1992).
- b. The following questions are posed for you to reflect on some of the many issues related to the evaluation of materials, specifically in your case, “readers”:
  - 1) What do “readers” mean to you?
  - 2) What role are “readers” expected to play?
  - 3) What goals do they help learners to achieve?
  - 4) Are they one of several available resources?
  - 5) The evaluation of a reader should entail the concept of learner motivation and variables such as: pace, attractive appearance, personal involvement of the learners in the process, students’ age, social and cultural background, their learning objectives and the composition of the class. Do any of these criteria relate to the evaluation that you make of readers for a particular group of students?
  - 6) Enlarge the principles which show the variables under play in the evaluation of readers.
  - 7) Having got theoretical information focused on the evaluation of readers, would you still choose “The Secret Garden” as a reading material for your course? Why? / Why not?

## **Training session # 3**

The reading lesson
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- a. Read the extracts (pp. 60-63, 79-80, 87-93) taken from Grant’s (1987) book “Making the Most of Your Textbook”.
- b. For reflection:
  - Make two lists of reading objectives. In the first one, list the objectives proposed by Grant and, in the second, write your own objectives when planning reading lessons.
  - What importance do you attribute to the development of basic comprehension skills in the writing of a course’s reading objectives?
  - Which other objectives does “the authentic approach” to reading contribute to your list?
- c. Harmer (1991) presents a similar categorization of “receptive” skills as well as an exemplification of reading tasks which can well be added to the reflection on the previous extracts. Further, he explains that listening and reading, the so-called “receptive” skills, are not only receptive. Current research states that

students receive input through listening and reading but as they do so, their minds get activated processing the content and the language that they are receiving. They come to be active in the process. Read the extracts taken from Harmer's book "The Practice of English Language Teaching" (pp. 183-184, 188-189, and 190-211).

d. For reflection:

- Which are the "receptive skills" that Harmer mentions?
- Why, do you think, the investigator has categorized them into two types?
- The tasks that you are expected to read may be quite familiar to you but, could you list examples of activities that you actually conduct with your students below each of these two types and sub-types?
- Which are pre-; which, while- and which, post-reading tasks?
- Would you modify the list of objectives as stated at the beginning of the year for your reading lessons? How? Up to what extent?
- What changes would you introduce in the teaching procedure of the reading lessons that you conduct?

b. The third extract also corresponds to Harmer who lists the steps within a reading lesson. Read and analyze these stages and reflect up to what extent you could apply them in your reading lessons. Would you implement them as prescribed? Or, how would you adapt them to your own teaching situation?

#### **Training session # 4**

The visual design of reading materials
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1. Read the article by Ellis and Ellis "Learn by design: Some design criteria for EFL course-books" (1987).
2. Though the article was written for course-books, some of its implications can be well adapted to the design of "readers". Look at the following list of basic concepts on the visual design of learning materials and analyze them in terms of the reader that you have evaluated for classroom use.

a) Relevance

- In the context of design (i.e. title, chapter headings, illustrations, etc)
- To the audience (e.g. Sufficient variety of design, visual design at the right level for the learner, the density of the text at the right level for the learner)
- In colour (e.g. Colour attracts attention, colour frames and/or enhances a text, colour complements the particular theme, colour is relevant to the text)



b) Accessibility

- The reading path (i.e. Clarity from one part of the reader to another, clarity from text to pictures and vice-versa)
- Quality (i.e. Decent quality of pages and covers)
- Friendliness to teachers and students:
  - Interesting
  - The layout helps find one's way through the pages
  - Attracting and motivating
- Cohesion:
  - The various components of the book hold well together
  - The pages have a coherence (i.e. a unifying visual element, the location of the page number, the type face)
  - Typographical conventions give consistent clues to the relative importance of items and the reading path

In the second set of extracts, you will read about illustrators of famous books and about their job experiences.

- Highlight the phrases and/or paragraphs which strike you most.
- Being familiar with their experiences and their purposes on illustrating books,
  - What new classroom applications could you find when working on the illustrations of a reader?
  - What kind of follow-up activities would you conduct through which the learners can find a link between the illustrations and the ultimate objective of the course; i.e. Encourage the students to communicate accurately and fluently in the target language?
  - Would any of the activities suggested on the sheets suit this purpose?



**Appendix D: Formal analysis as work-plan of the book “The Secret Garden” and reflection tasks completed by the teacher during the training course.**

**Training Session # 1**

**The school’s mission statement and the Primary English Department goals**

- The term “holistically” appears to be a key word in this statement, what do you think it means?

**I think that students’ education must be integral, considering the overall aspects - as a whole thing –**

**Rather than a collection of parts.**

- What’s the relationship between this term and the last part of the statement?

**To be able to do, think and feel students should be trained integrally.**

- Which are the Primary English Department goals? Can you list them?

1. Favour the development of linguistic competence according to each group’s level.
2. Enable the students to achieve a greater degree of communicative complexity taking into account comprehension as well as production of oral and written messages in the foreign language.
3. Facilitate the recognition of different kinds of discourse.
4. Motivate the production of suitable messages in different communicative situations.
5. Take into account previous knowledge and individual capacities to encourage students to sit for international exams.
6. Help students in developing thinking strategies to conceptualize and categorize the world.
7. Give the students a broader vision of the world referring to the diversity of cultures.
8. Promote responsible attitudes towards work.
9. Favour the acceptance of other’s differences with tolerance and respect.
10. Stimulate students’ self-esteem and value for other’s achievements.
11. To be receptors and active originators of oral and written messages that allow students the flow of coherent communication (in connection with their level in the foreign language).
12. To be competent in the understanding / interpretation of a text selected to be read or listened to.
13. To be competent in the production of appropriate coherent texts in a specific communicative situation.

**The expectations before mentioned will be framed in the active, responsible and orderly participation, and in a respectful attitude towards partners and the teacher.**

Specifically speaking, up to what extent do the reading objectives of the course-work achieve the school's aim and the department's objectives?

In general terms I think the reading objectives achieve the school's aim and the department's objectives since reading is not only used for learning but also for pleasure, communication of feelings ideas and thoughts. Nevertheless the department's objectives are focused more on the academic aspects rather than the attitudinal goals.

I try to structure the children's learning so that in their work they are involved in a wide range of activities. It is important that the children appreciate where their learning fits into their experience. If the reading chosen is directly relevant to children's experiences or interests, they will want to search for meaning and they will be able to explore it in greater depth, leading to more stimulating challenges than those provided by superficial language activities. These provide the children with a genuine purpose both for their language learning and for their learning in general. They are no longer learning for its own sake but in order to extend their learning horizons in a holistic way.

The advantage in taking all these points into account is that they provide a clear context which makes learning more meaningful and creates a genuine purpose for learning and using the language.

- Which attitude goals do you promote in your reading lessons?

First, the children need to be prepared linguistically to give them the "confidence" to use English, being "confidence" one of the most important attitude goals for me. Reading together is also a benefit; sharing the same activities and experiences unifies the group, establishing closer bonds among children as well as between children and teacher.

Furthermore, it is a commonplace that children learn better through play or fun activities.

I teach 10-11 year old students, at this age stories about families and friends should not only reassure children about themselves but provide them with new insights into how other families and children cope with various situations. They enjoy stories that extend their experiences.

Reading should promote the formation of a "positive attitude" to language learning in general. By taking up reading children gain access to richness of language and they are also exposed to such issues as loss, death, friendship, responsibility, power and domination which can intensify their sensitivity and help them in the task of growing up.

- Which would you add after reading the extract?

After reading the extract, I wouldn't add anything else, but what I would make is a good and efficient combination of both: content and attitude goals so as to improve the focusing of teaching.

## Training session # 2

### General criterion for the evaluation of EXTENSIVE READING MATERIALS

#### 1- What do “readers” mean to you?

Readers are a way to provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language presented in a context that is familiar to the students. They are a useful tool in linking fantasy and the imagination with the child’s real world.

#### 2- What role are “readers” expected to play?

There are several points which have to be analyzed so as to evaluate if a reader is suitable or not:

**Purpose:** it must be clearly defined

**Type:** the type of exercise has to accomplish the purpose effectively and economically.

**Content:** the proportion of language given must be economic.

**Interest:** it should be interesting.

**Authenticity:** It must be meaningful and challenging.

**Difficulty:** it shouldn’t contain distracting difficulties.

#### 3- What goals do they help learners to achieve?

Using readers allows the teacher to introduce or revise vocabulary and sentence structure by exposing children to the language.. Readers are means of developing learning to learn: reinforcing thinking strategies, developing strategies for learning the second language, developing study skills and concentrating skills such as visual clues and prior knowledge

.They also help to achieve the reading for general understanding and the reading for detail.

It is also important to mention that reading can be used as a prompt for speaking and by reading and thinking they can solve problems.

Students also develop with a degree of communicative competence, in accordance with their level, the necessary ability to express ideas, feelings and thoughts.-

They help learners to have pleasure and confidence in exploring the language, they make students want and dare to communicate and above all the students will develop a moral, physical, emotional and intellectual growth.

#### **4-Are they one of several available resources?**

Yes, according to Allwright (1981) readers are only part of the co-operative management of language learning so it's crucial not overemphasize their importance. I refer to audio visual material, extra exercises for comprehension , oral and written activities to revise vocabulary, charts to be completed by the students to make comparisons between the reader and the video , reading reflections sheet which will reflect the students' attitude toward reading (at the beginning of the program, and again later to demonstrate changes in this important aspect of literacy development), a reading checklist (a student self-report) which provides information about students' reading behaviour, point of view sheet in which the students describe the different points of view of two characters and so forth.

**5-The evaluation of a reader should entail the concept of learner motivation and variables such as: pace, attractive appearance, personal involvement of the learners in the process, students' age , social and cultural background, their learning objectives**

**and the composition of the class. Do any of these criteria relate to the choice that you make of readers for a particular group of students?**

Yes, of course. Whenever I choose a reader for a particular group of students I consider all these criteria, baring in mind what Marie Clay (in her book "Becoming Literate", 1991) specifies: "Reading is a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced". (This connected to motivation).

**6- Enlarge the principles which show the variables under play in the evaluation process.**

When we analyze reading materials at the beginning of the year, we are evaluating the theoretical value, or the "construct validity" that is to say the materials as they stand – without reference to their actual use in the classroom. We don't know how these materials actually work with the class. According to Breen (1989) there are three phases in the evaluation of materials:

- a. Materials as-work plan (theoretical value of materials)
- b. Materials-in-process (provide indicators as to whether the materials are successful or not)
- c. Outcomes from materials (represent the relative achievement of learners)

**7- Having got theoretical information focused on the evaluation and selection of readers, would you still choose "The Secret Garden" as a reading material for your course? Why?/ Why not?**

Yes, I would still choose “The Secret Garden” as a reading material for my course because: firstly, this reader successfully fulfills with the important aspects I have just learned reading these notes: the purpose is clearly defined, the proportion of language given is economic, it is interesting and challenging and tasks are meaningful. Secondly, because I already know the outcomes from this material which actually represent the learners’ achievements. Students show genuine interest in spite of the fact that the book doesn’t have a very attractive appearance and the activities I usually present encourage the personal involvement of the learners in the learning process.



### Training Session #3

#### The reading lesson

**1-Make two lists of reading objectives. In the first one, list the objectives proposed by Grant and, in the second, write your own objectives when planning reading lessons.**

**1- Reading objectives proposed by Grant:**

- To develop basic comprehension skills so that they can read and understand texts of a general nature.
- To be able to use reading to increase their general knowledge.
- To be able to decide about their reading purpose, and to adapt their methods of reading according to this.
- To develop the ability to read critically.

**My own objectives when planning a reading lesson:**

**Help students in:**

- Identifying the purpose of the reading.
- Identifying the scope of the reading.
- Letting them know how the content will be used.
- To develop the ability to read critically.

**With students practice**

- Previewing the chapter and its questions posed at the end.
- Predicting results or information.
- Selecting unfamiliar words or information
- Planning and allocating time.
- Help students to realize how the current reading assignment builds on or is interconnected with past reading.

**Help students organized by:**

- Letting them know what materials they need.
- Suggesting that they outline the chapter
- Suggesting that students check for understanding by self questioning.
- Reviewing their outlines.
- Summarizing the chapter.
- Writing definitions to terms and vocabulary in their own words.
- Identifying confusing material and raising questions.
- Re-reading as necessary.

**Remind students to ask themselves:**

- Did I learn the terms?
- Can I state the main point?
- Am I prepared to talk about it?
- Does my work show what I know?
- Can I apply my knowledge?

**2- What importance do you attribute to the development of basic comprehension skills in the writing of a course's reading objectives?**

I think the development of basic comprehension skills is essential. I try to train students to read beyond the lines so as reading will appear as part of their experience, to real life – in particular to their own opinions, knowledge and imagination. To do so, they should acquire the ability to read between the lines, to draw inferences from what is in the text, they can do this by selecting clues and asking them to suggest at least one possible inference they can make from those clues. To “read between the lines” they need to consider not only the story clues, but also what they know about the people in general and about the story characters. Students must be aware that the purpose of reading is to learn some specified content. Unfortunately, learning is not always the goal for some students, for example, I realized that the purpose of reading of some students was to get through it, concluding that they were not active readers, because to read actively students must know how to discern the structure and organization of a paragraph, identify the main idea, know relevant facts, reasons and examples that develop the main idea, identify new vocabulary, paraphrase a sentence, to reduce it to the essential targeted meaning. Knowing the structure of paragraphs enables the students to develop procedural knowledge skills so that they can remember what they have read and how it is related.

**3- Which other objectives does “the authentic approach to reading contribute to your list?**

Employing the authentic approach or the real life approach helps students to improve their reading habits:

- Reading silently, which is how most of us have to learn to reading real life.
- Reading words in units of meaning (phrases) and skip them if they are not essential.
- Reading faster and with fluency.
- Relying on their own reading skills to get the meaning from the text.
- Facing students with a text that could appear outside the classroom
- Encourage students to perform realistic tasks which help to develop real-life reading skills.
- Acquire confidence gradually when faced with written English and this can be possible by reading the texts to get a general idea of their meaning.
- Encouraging students to read for gist, information and study.

**For Gist:** - encourage interested talk about real life issues.

- help to prepare the students for other useful language activities later (ex: writing letters)

**For information:** - requires the reader to read making selections.

**For study:** - preview a text.

**4- Which are the “receptive skills” that Harmer mentions?**

a- **Predictive Skills:** students predictions will be the result of the expectations they have. Predictions will change as they receive more information from the text. This technique places great emphasis on the lead-in stage and encourages students to predict the content of the text. It gives them an interesting and motivating purpose for reading.

b- **Extracting specific information:** This skill when applied to reading is often called **scanning**. Students concentrate on the Particular item that interests them, disregarding the other information. This skill can be satisfactorily performed even though students do not understand the whole text, since they may well have to comprehend reading in just such a situation in real life.

c-**Getting the general picture:** When applied to reading this skill is often called **skimming** and it entails the reader's ability to pick out main points rapidly discarding what is not essential or relevant to that general picture.

d-**Extracting detailed information:** The information required can be of many kinds, what the writer means, what precisely the speaker is trying to say, or the writer's attitude. We should not forget the importance of detailed reading.

e- **Recognising function and discourse patterns:** recognizing discourse markers is an important part of understanding how a text is constructed as well as paragraph structure and organization, and devices for cohesion. We need to make students aware of these features in order to help them to become more efficient readers.

f- **Deducing meaning from context :** We must help students to develop their ability to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context. Our job is to re-activate these skills which learners have in their own language but which may be less effective when they are faced with English, If we can make students feel less anxious we dramatically improve their receptive abilities.

### 5- Why do you think , the investigator has categorized them into two types?

The author has categorized the receptive skills into two types:

#### TYPE 1: Predictive skills

Extracting specific information

Getting the general picture

These tasks form the basis for the first activities that students are asked to perform when learning receptive skills.

#### TYPE 2: Extracting detailed information

Recognizing function and discourse patterns

Deducing meaning from context.

These are used when reading involves detailed comprehension or analysis of a text. They are generally practiced after type 1 skills have been worked on.

I think the author divided these skills into two types because this is the most efficient and natural way to acquire the receptive skills (type 1 followed by type 2) If students perform unsuccessfully tasks type 1, the teacher may re-direct them to the same task to try again.

6-The tasks that you are expected to read may be quite familiar to you but, could you list examples of activities that you actually conduct with your students below each of these two types and sub-types?.

## 7-Which are pre-, which, while- and which post reading tasks?

### PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- Reading profile
- Analyzing the title and predicting contents.
- Comments about the author. Completion of charts.
- Comments on photos, subtitles.
- Working on new vocabulary items:
  - ◆ Matching terms and definitions.
  - ◆ Classifying words by topic.

### WHILE-READING ACTIVITIES

- Reading aloud.
- Discussing contents read.
- Predicting what will come next.
- Paraphrasing new items.
- Questions to test comprehension.
- Vocabulary list.
- Summarizing of paragraphs

### AFTER-READING ACTIVITIES:

- Crosswords.
- Passwords.
- Completion paragraphs (cards) to be passed around in group work.
- Discussion / Debate.
- Analysis of characters' personalities.
- Comparative chart (among characters)
- Retelling of plot.
- Acting out.
- Video activities for predicting, inferring, etc.
- Comparative chart : differences between video and book..
- Making posters.
- Writing a letter.
- Story elements form.
- Making inferences sheet.
- Reading checklist.(students' self report)

**8- Would you modify the list of objectives as stated at the beginning of the year for your reading lessons? How? Up to what extent?**

**9- What changes would you introduce in the teaching procedure of the reading lessons that you conduct?**

In fact, I have already modified it. In point 1 (for reflection) I included in my new list of objectives: **“to enable the students to develop the ability to read critically”** , a point

which I haven't considered before. There's another important thing which I absolutely agree with and it is the use of supplementary material . Unfortunately as I am working against time, I don't have the chance to use this kind of material. (advertisements, brochures , or extracts from short stories or novels, but I would like to.

**e- The third extract also corresponds to Harmer who lists the steps within a reading lesson. Read and analyze these stages and reflect up to what extent you could apply them in your reading lessons. Would you implement them as prescribed? Or, how would you adapt them to your own teaching situation?**

In general terms I apply these steps in my reading lessons, but not in a complete or orderly way, for example: I always start with the lead-in stage and then, with the comprehension task, but when I have to direct the feedback , students never check their answers with each other first, they check them with me. As regards follow up activities, students give opinions about what they have just read , they summarize the content of the text or make dialogues (dramatizations) of a part of the text. But, it all depends on the groups of students, sometimes I have to adapt these steps to my own teaching situation. I would like to add a comment : It's very important to know the techniques because they give you a frame in which you can work in a more relaxed way, but another thing is to apply them once you are confronted with the book and the children's responses, sometimes I follow their reactions to set activities. I have often found that inventing tasks by responding to children's needs and suggestions as they are reading, is the most successful approach.

## Training Session # 4

### The visual design of reading materials

#### 1- a- Relevance

Relevance in the context of design can spell the difference between excellence and mediocrity. We should pay attention to the following:

Signposts, audience, colour and mimesis.

As regards **Signposts** : the chapter headings are useful signposts to the content of the book. "The Secret Garden" has no chapter headings so to attract the students' interest, they should inevitably have to read and in that way they can get involved in the story.

Every 2 or 3 pages there are black and white photographs taken from the movie version but they are not of a particular high quality, these are not words, but they can provide excellent backup. Under each photograph there are quotations which define, consolidate and contextualize. The photographs interact with the text.

**Audience:** I consider this book doesn't contain sufficient variety of design to interest the learners, although they watch the photographs and comment about them, mainly making references to the film that some of the students have seen. The use of photograph is at the right level for students since in most of them the main characters (children) appear. I think that the density and variety of text is also at the right level for them. I assume that in "The Secret Garden" **colour** is not really necessary. The choice of black and white is not accidental: it complements and brings out a particular theme- Mary's (the main character) emotional state.

#### b- Accessibility

The **reading path** is fundamental to easy access. A well designed path keeps the flow of information going. The text is set in two type sizes which serve to highlight vital information: the general text and the quotations under the photographs.

**Quality** : attention to overall design is seen to be crucial to the final product. This adaptation of "The Secret Garden" was published by Penguin Books in 1997 and the general quality of the book design is medium. The cover is colourful but the paper used is rough, although most people today allow that the general quality of textbook design has improved a lot.

**Friendliness:** We have at last realized that people learn faster when they are enjoying what is going on, and teachers teach better when they are enjoying what they are doing. Book layout and design can help this process enormously. I'm very interested in this topic, the layout helps me find my way round the page, I think there isn't a logical movement from one page to another, the page doesn't tell me what language work we are doing, and if I had this book in my hands for the first time I wouldn't be so much motivated to look through it.

**Cohesion** : Talking about design cohesion not all the components of the book hold together, principally visually and in terms of accessibility. The pages of a unit don't have a coherence about them. Overall coherence is achieved through a variety of signals and patterns.

**Uniformity of page allocation to chapters :** “The Secret Garden” is not divided into chapters, so sometimes it is quite difficult to organize the reading. Students don’t get the idea where some parts of the story end and some others start ,very easily.

**Colour:** as I already said the use of colour is not relevant .

Typographical and design conventions adopted don’t indicate clearly what is happening and they are not used consistently. The book is merely a linear progression, an endless repetition of the same approach.

**Highlight the phrases and-or paragraphs which strike you most**

**Diane and Leo Dillon**

“Together we are able to create art we would not be able to do individually”

“When we sit down and start throwing ideas back and forth, one inspires the other and triggers new thoughts”

“Working together isn’t always easy, sometimes we do disagree but that’s life”

The Dillons do much more than illustrate words through their art, they enrich the story by adding small touches, new layers of meaning”.

**Phoebe Gilman**

Phoebe says that she had the basic idea for more than ten years. But ideas alone are not books. “The idea is just the beginning ”. “What is important is the determination to sit down and work at it ,without an idea, you are nowhere”

**Steven Kellog**

“I’m always doing visual homework”. “I know some artists use models when they draw, but I don’t. I’m always storing up images and expressions in my memory file that I can flip through and draw upon when I’m actually working on a book” “Part of what artists do is inspire everyone to be more observant, to be more aware of the world around us. Once we take things for granted, we stop seeing- we stop appreciating the wonder of the visual world”. Perhaps because Steven is both a writer and an illustrator he believes that words and pictures are equally important.

**Barbara Reid**

Barbara thinks that with a little effort, just about anybody can create a good picture using plasticine. “Plasticine is friendly”. She has a deep respect for the words in a story. “You see some books that have been around for a million years with crummy illustrations, but it’s the story that people keep coming back to” “The story is the most important part”.<sup>3</sup>

**David Macaulay**

Before beginning any book, David spends months doing research. In his pictures he always tries to make the reader more of a participant than spectator. David says that if a reader can

share the experience of being involved in a process, he will remember it. "If I have any expertise at all, it is in that kind of communication. "The fun lies in developing the idea and creating a fluid framework for both words and pictures".

### **Classroom applications working on the illustrations of a reader.**

#### **Follow –up activities.**

##### ❖ Art project

Taking into account the richness and beauty of illustrations an art project can be worked on in groups. Students will have to discuss the project before deciding which materials to use and also they will have to learn how to trust and respect each other's abilities.

#### **Art project: a garden**

- ❖ Dramatizations (using predictions)
- ❖ The use of the reader as a model to create their own illustrated books.
- ❖ Writing a letter talking about Collin (one of the characters)
- ❖ The time is 5 years after the story finishes , Mary is writing her story.
- ❖ Group work: The teacher will hand out copies of photographs from the reader, students will have to describe and make comments about them. Then, the teacher will hand out a questionnaire and get the students to read, analyze and answer the questions.
- ❖ Teacher will provide students with a serie of pictures from the reader, students will cut and order them according to the events in the story, then they will have to make up the story.
- ❖ Let's play cards: group work (4 people) Teacher will hand out 2 sets of cards to each group. One of the sets containing characters photographs and the other character's attitudes. The cards are shuffled and students will have to find the pairs .
- ❖ Board Game: selection, ordering, summarizing and assessment of events in visual format.
- ❖ A Balloon Debate: Teacher asks the students to imagine that the three main characters in the story were placed in a hot-air balloon. The balloon is loosing altitude because of a small hole in it. One character must be thrown overboard to keep the balloon aloft. Teacher divides the class into 3 groups and assigns a character to each group, then she encourages each group to find reasons to justify the survival of their character and arguments against the survival of the others. A representative of each group is chosen to make a speech to justify "his-her" survival. Teacher organizes a follow-up group-to group session in which questions to each of the role played characters are asked, students are expected to justify the reasons behind their actions. Teacher gets the students to vote and decide on the character that must be ejected. Students are not allowed to vote for the character they are representing. The teacher presides and can favour or go against one of the characters in case of a draw or a serious disagreement.



**Appendix E: Extracts from the most salient parts of the teacher's lesson-planning**

**Lesson 1**

Lead-in stage

Pre-reading task I: Read about the author from the back cover of the book and complete the following chart:

Name	
Nationality	
Age	
Famous stories s/he wrote	

Grouping technique: Individual work

Pre-reading task II: Overview the photographs of the book and predict what will happen in the story.

Grouping technique: Pair-work

Post-reading stage

Comprehension Task: Questionnaire based on reading between and beyond the lines.

E.g. How, do you think, Mary felt when she arrived in Yorkshire?

Why, did you say, the house was sad?

Would you like to live in a house like that? Why? /Why not?

Grouping technique: Lockstep

**Lesson 3**

Lead-in stage

Pre-reading task: Questioning based on reading between the lines. Choose the adjectives out of the list presented and answer: How did Mary feel on her first days in the house? Why?

E.g. Inferior

Sad

Depressed

Happy

Angry  
Bad-tempered  
Lonely

Grouping technique: Lockstep

#### **Lesson 4**

Lead-in stage

Pre-reading task: Predicting:

E.g. Who was crying in the house?  
Did Mary know who he was?

Grouping technique: Lockstep

Post-reading stage

Comprehension Task I: Confirming or disconfirming predictions based on the two questions posed at the pre-reading task.

Grouping technique: Lockstep

Comprehension Task II: Questionnaire based on reading between and beyond the lines.

E.g. Why, do you think, Colin is always in his room?  
Is it right what Mr. Craven does with his son?  
Is Colin interested in Mary? Why/Why not?

Grouping technique: Pair-work

Text-related task: Complete the following chart and find similarities and differences between Mary and Colin; account for these similarities and differences:

Characters	Mary	Colin
Age		
Likes and dislikes		
Feelings and moods		

Grouping technique: Group work

## **Lesson 5**

### Lead-in stage

Pre-reading task: Predicting:

E.g. Will Colin meet Dickon?  
Did Dickon know about Colin?

Grouping technique: Lockstep

### Post-reading stage

Comprehension task: Confirming or disconfirming the two questions posed at the pre-reading task.

Grouping technique: Lockstep

Text-related task: Guided Role-playing

Each member of a pair of students receives a card from which they will be able to reproduce a dialogue extracted from the text read on the lesson. They are expected to read the lines and act the situation out. Subsequent pairs of students have to try to reproduce the same dialogue not using the cards as aids but improvising on the previous dialogue produced by the first pair.

Grouping technique: Pair-work

## **Lesson 6**

### Lead-in stage

Pre-reading task: Predicting

E.g. Was Colin repented?  
Was he much better now?

Grouping technique: Lockstep

### Post-reading stage

Comprehension task: Confirming or disconfirming the two questions posed at pre-reading task.

Grouping technique: Lockstep

Text-related task: Completing a “Story Elements” form.  
The students are expected to complete the following:

- a. Story title
- b. Describe the setting of the story
- c. Describe the main characters
- d. Explain the problem, showing what the conflict is.
- e. List the main plot events.
- f. Tell the solution or outcome of the story.

Grouping technique: Individual work

## **Lesson 7**

Reading stage

Reading task: Silent jigsaw reading.

The teacher presents the students with the jigsaw reading technique for the first time. She divides the class into three groups and assigns each of them a part of the lesson’s reading text. The learners have to read their parts silently and then answer a questionnaire based on literal reading and reading between the lines within the groups.

Grouping technique: Individual/Group-work

## **Lesson 8**

Post-reading stage

Text-related task: Reaching a consensus

The teacher presents the students with the following situation: Mr. Craven, Colin and Mary want to have a flight in a hot-air balloon but there is only enough room for two people. The students have to decide in groups which character they think should step down and why.

Grouping technique: Group-work

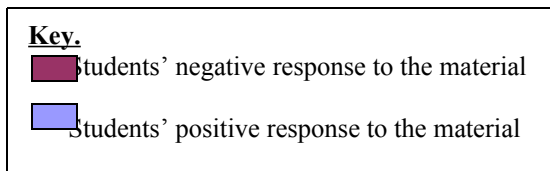
**Appendix F: Observation Scheme**

1. Students' interest and motivation in the reading lesson itself.	
2. Students' general involvement in the theme presented at the lead-in stage.	
3. Students' cultural acceptance of the material presented.	
4. Students' attention to teacher's reading or the reading of others.	
5. At the post-reading stage, students' response to: a) Literal reading. b) Reading between the lines. c) Reading beyond the lines.	
6. Students' work in follow-up interaction tasks and/or games.	
7. Students' use of supplementary material (e.g. video, wallpictures, flashcards, etc.).	
8. Students' oral comments on visual materials (i.e. pictures, illustrations, artwork, front cover design, etc.).	

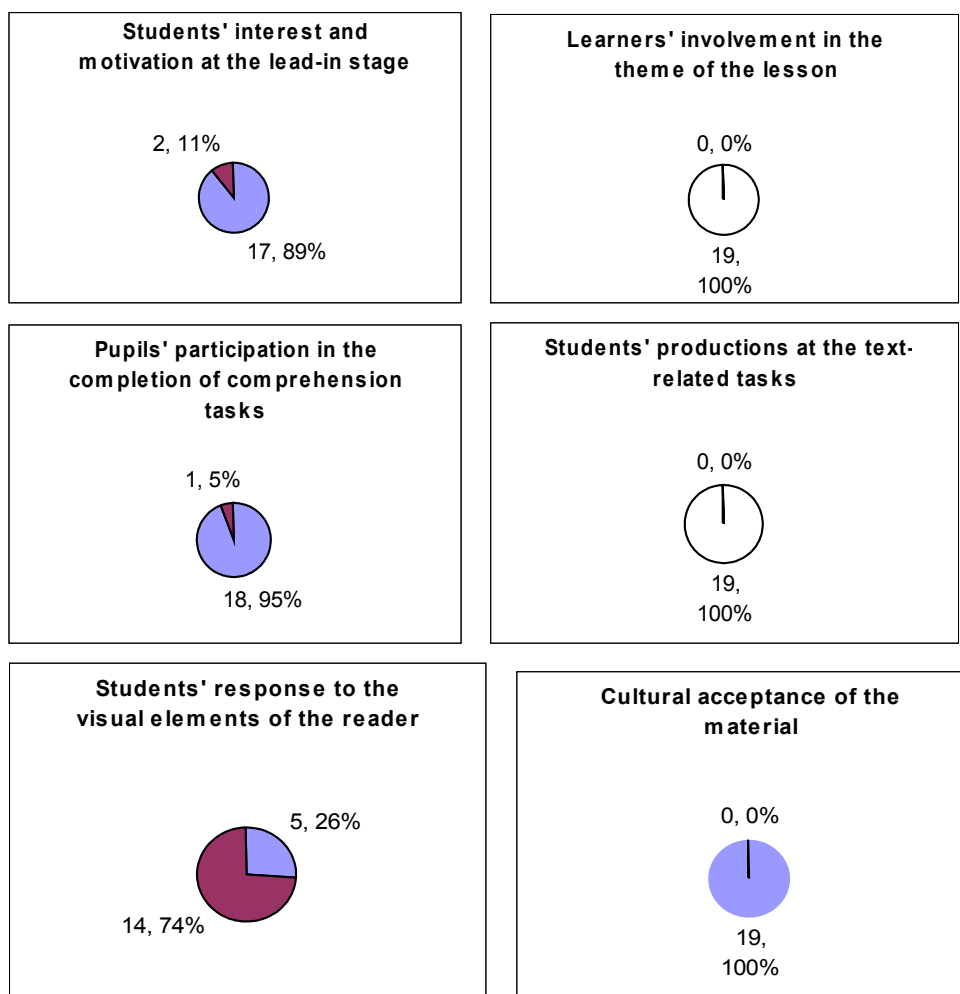
Which other comments can be made with reference to each of the categories observed?

### **Appendix G: Results and comments obtained from the Observation Scheme**

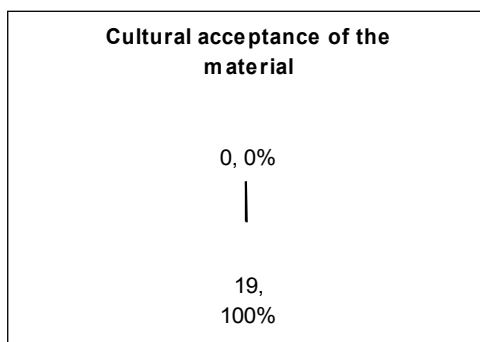
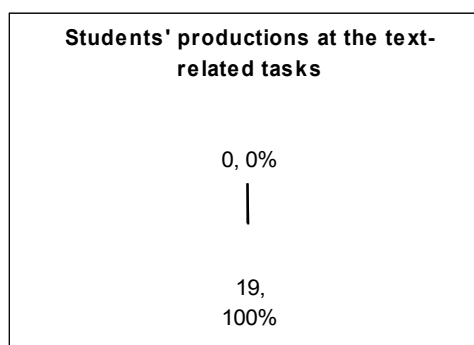
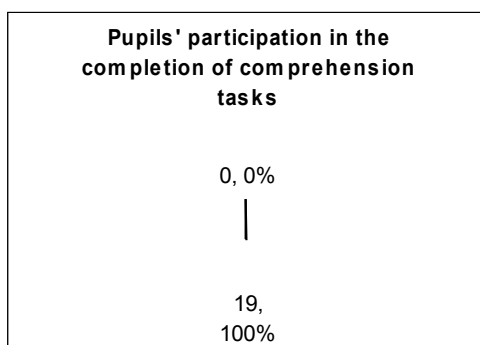
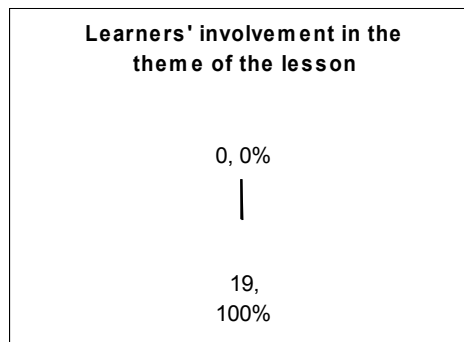
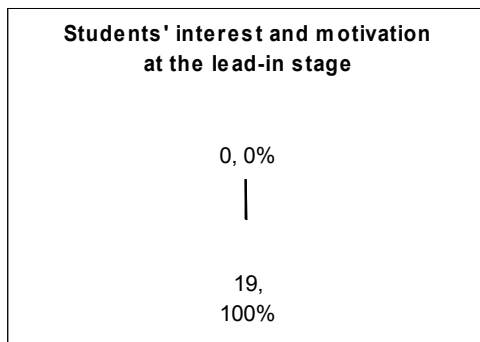
These are the results obtained from the Observation Scheme at the implementation phase of the investigative project:



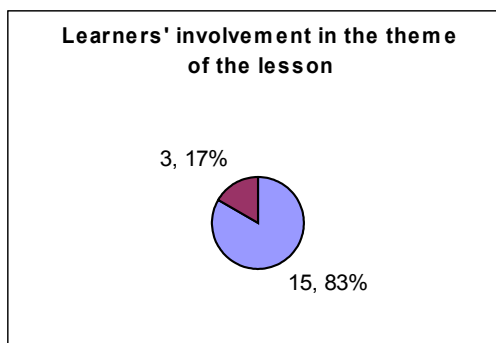
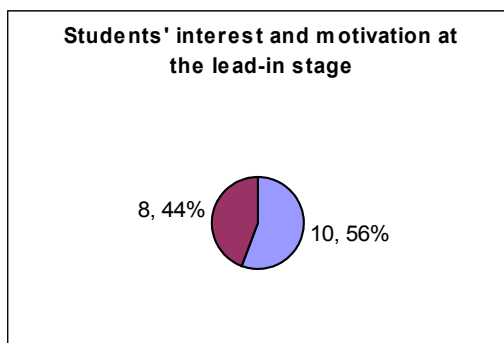
Lesson 1: Total number of students : 19



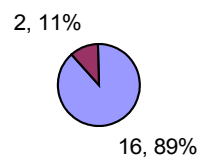
Lesson 2: Total number of students: 19



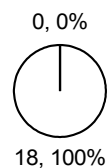
Lesson 3: Total number of students: 18



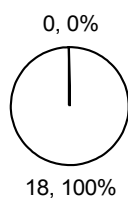
**Pupils' participation in the completion of comprehension tasks**



**Students' productions at the text-related tasks**

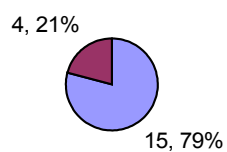


**Cultural acceptance of the material**

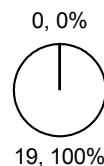


Lesson 4: Total number of students: 19

**Students' interest and motivation at the lead-in stage**



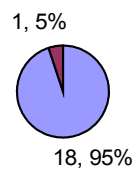
**Learners' involvement in the theme of the lesson**



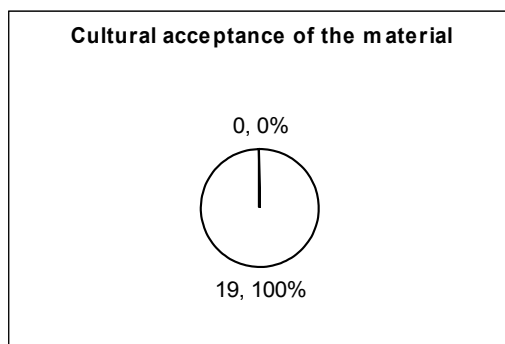
**Pupils' participation in the completion of comprehension tasks**



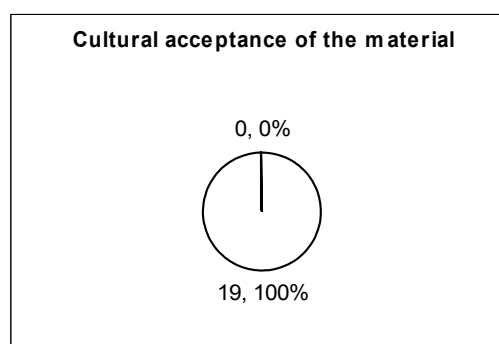
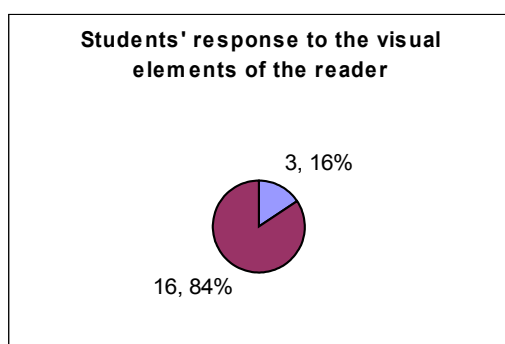
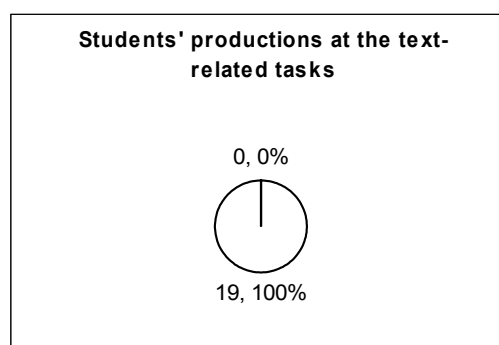
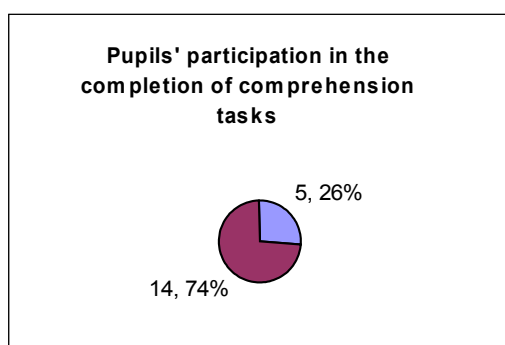
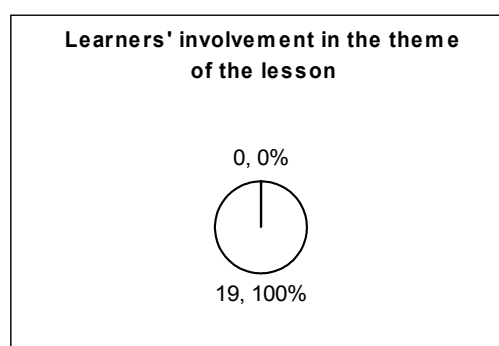
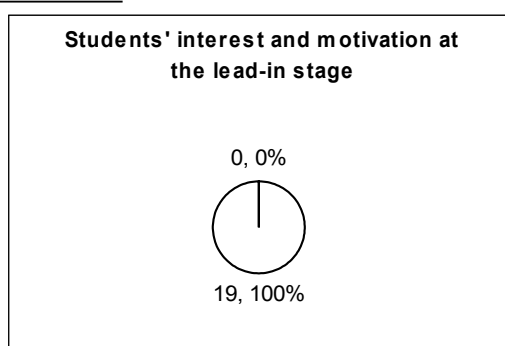
**Students' productions at the text-related tasks**



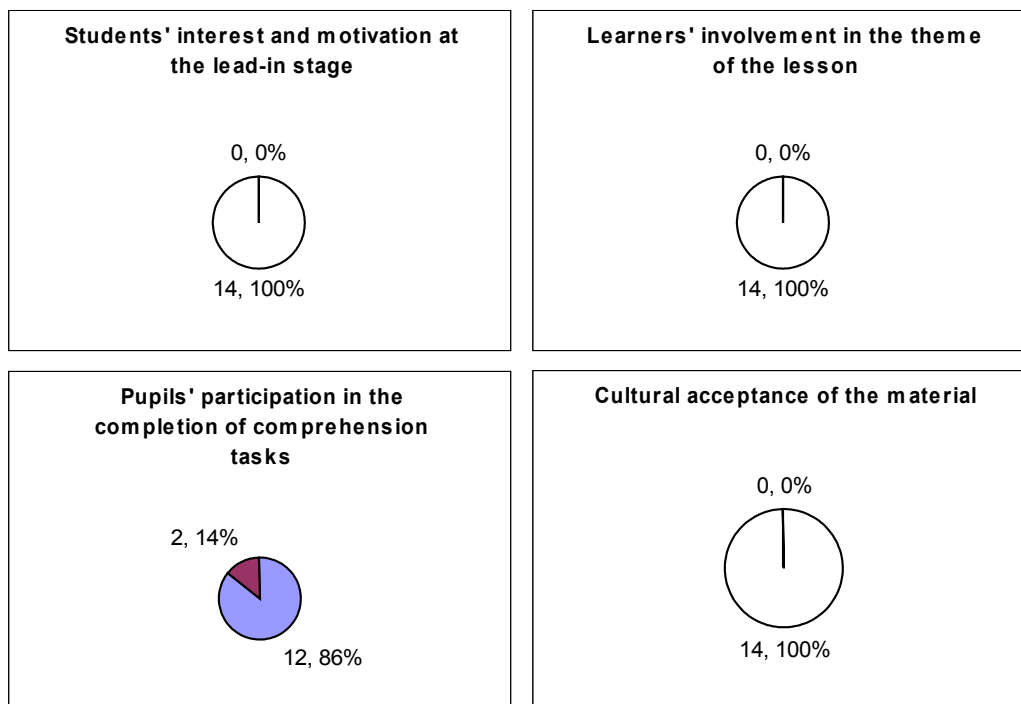




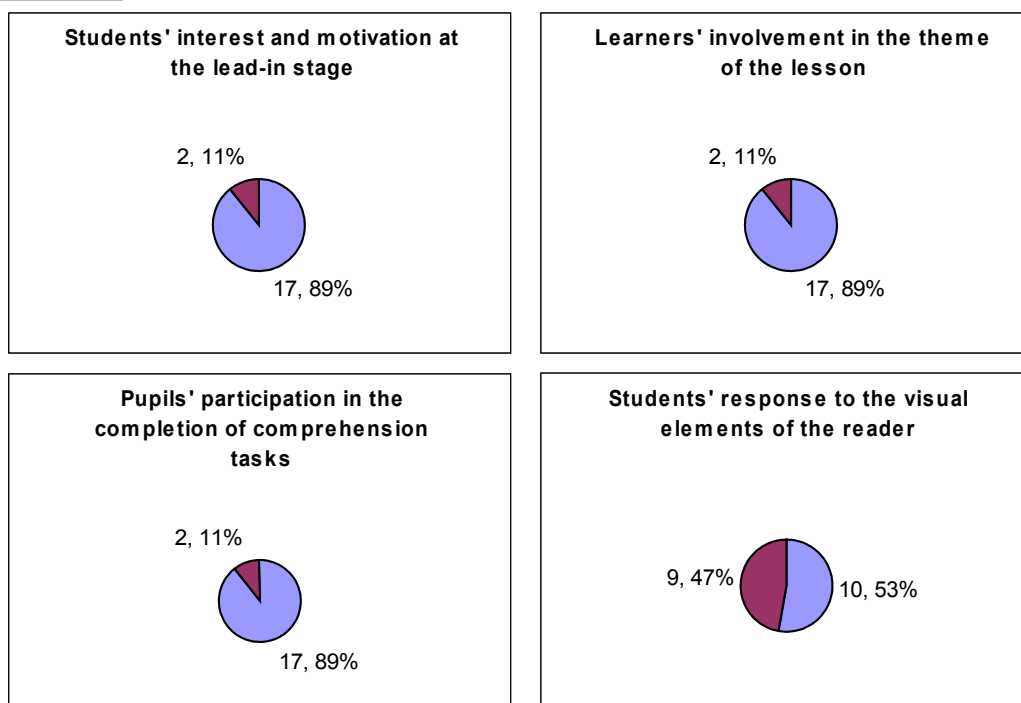
Lesson 5: Total number of students: 19

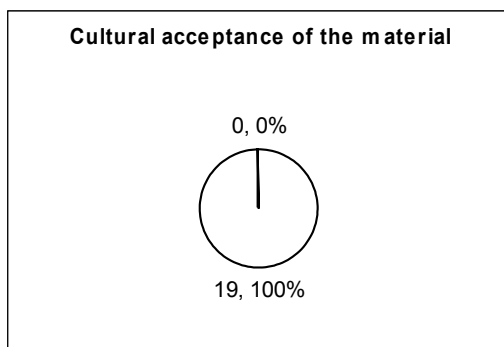


Lesson 6: Total number of students: 14

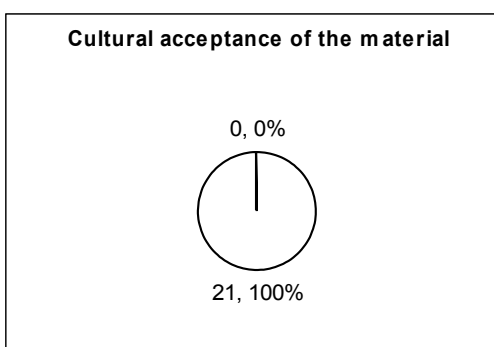
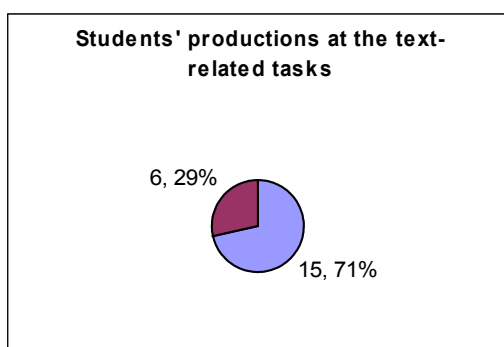
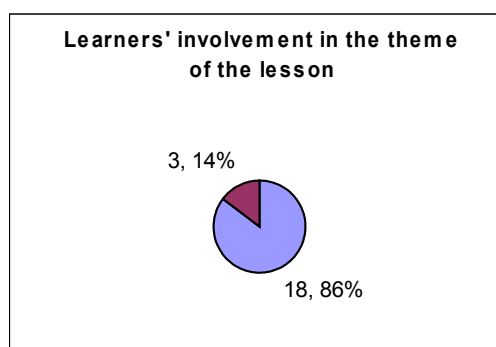
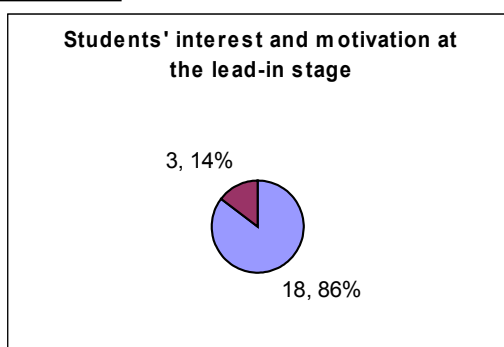


Lesson 7: Total number of students: 19





Lesson 8: Total number of students: 21



These are my comments as an observer of the implementation phase of the investigative project:

Lesson # 1:

“Some of the students can answer the teacher’s questions on the visual elements of the reader because they say they have seen the film but the photographs are not clear enough”.

“At the lead-in the students complete a chart (i.e. name, nationality, age, stories she wrote, etc.) about the author.”

“The teacher requests the students’ opinions through questions such as “How, do you think, Mary felt when she arrived in Yorkshire?”, “Why, did you say, the house was sad?” or “Would you like to live in a house like that? Why? Why not?”, thus encouraging them to read beyond the lines.”

### Lesson # 2:

“At the lead-in the students are strongly involved in the two activities proposed: A true/false game and a prediction task.”

“As part of the post-reading, the group can either confirm or disconfirm the predictions they have previously made.”

“Also the teacher asks a questionnaire through which the learners can develop their ability to read between and beyond the lines.”

“The students are asked to work in groups on a reaching-a-consensus activity.”

“The teacher planned her lesson taking into account part of the information acquired during the training course. She asks the students to read the text twice before inquiring them on specific information.”

### Lesson # 3:

“Again the teacher asks the students to give their opinions on Mary’s (the main character of the story) mood at a particular episode and to account for those opinions.”

### Lesson # 4:

“At the lead-in the teacher planned an activity on predictions based on the questions:

- Who was crying in the house?
- Did Mary know who this person was?

She is introducing prediction activities.”

“At the post-reading, the students are expected to:

- a. Divide themselves in pairs and answer questions which demand them reading between the lines, e.g. Why, do you think, Colin is always in his room? Is Mr. Craven’s attitude towards his son appropriate? Why/not?, Is Colin interested in interacting with Mary? Why/not?
- b. Find similarities and differences between the two main characters, Mary and Colin, (e.g. feelings and moods, likes and dislikes, their parents, their physical appearances, etc.), complete a chart and account for those similarities and differences. She has introduced a text-related task”

Lesson # 5:

“Before the reading proper the teacher writes two questions on the blackboard for the students to predict on what they are going to read:

- Will Colin meet Dickon?
- Did Dickon know about Colin?”

“The reading is very involving for the group. The students want to go on reading when the teacher interrupts the task to check whether they can confirm or not their predictions.”

“The teacher asks questions on one of the photographs. As happened on the first lesson, the students’ response is low because the photograph is not clear. One of the girls complains about that.”

“Good response at the post-reading. The students complete a reaching-a-consensus activity and work on a guided role-playing. Again, text-related tasks.”

Lesson # 6:

“As a follow-up to the activity “Scrambled words” proposed at the lead-in, teacher and students interact through, for example, the following dialogue:

- S1: Mary was afraid of Colin.
- S2: Mary wasn’t afraid of him.
- T: How did she show that?
- S3: She wanted to help him.”

“Next the teacher writes two questions on the blackboard for prediction purposes:

- Was Colin repented?
- How did he feel?”

“At the post-reading the students confirm their predictions.”

Lesson # 7:

“As a follow-up conducted after the lead-in activity, teacher and students interact through, for example, the following conversation thus expanding the students’ views on the text:

- S1: Colin never says “Please”.
- T: In what context?
- S2: When he talks to Mary.
- S3: At the beginning of the story.
- T: Why is this strange?

S4: Because he feels he does not have to be polite.”

“At the reading stage the teacher conducts the jigsaw reading procedure. Each group reads its assigned reading piece and answers a questionnaire in relation to it. The students respond positively and enthusiastically to the new procedure but their responses decline when they have to answer the questions.”

“At the post-reading stage the teacher conducts an observation game on the photographs presented in the reader. The students’ response is again low due to the lack of clarity of the material.”

#### Lesson # 8:

“At the post-reading the students are presented with a group-work discussion and they also make posters on the cover of the book, which will later be exhibited during the school’s book-fair in October. Once again, text-related tasks.”

“The video was never used as supplementary material to the story.”

**Appendix H: Extracts of the most significant parts of the teacher's diary-writing**

Lesson # 1:

“In general terms the students reacted well on this first lesson; they showed interest and were motivated. Most of them were involved in the theme...It's a pity that the activity on the photographs couldn't be carried out successfully because the material was not clear.”

Lesson # 2:

“They liked the first part in which they were supposed to answer “True” or “False”... They responded well to reading between and beyond the lines ...”

Lesson # 3:

“The students were particularly motivated when presented with the competition game “Gardens and Houses”.

Lesson # 4:

“This was a ... motivating class, the students participated, the atmosphere was nice ... and so they could respond in a more effective way, especially at the post-reading stage. There was a point in the lesson, when I told them to stop reading (i.e. climax in the story-line), in which they eagerly wanted to continue. This showed their interest and involvement; this could be due to the clarity in the development of the class. The activities could be conducted orderly and the whole planning of the lesson was implemented.”

Lesson # 5:

“It was quite an interesting class ... They were very enthusiastic when they played the “Tic-tac-toe” game and, at the end of the class, when they had to role play a situation from the story. But it was not so when they had to answer questions. All in all, ... they managed to communicate their ideas and the class turned out to be quite productive though the activity on the photographs presented difficulties again because the children couldn't see them properly.”

Lesson # 6:

“Today ... the students were deeply involved in the class. They worked well and enjoyed the class ... Their attention was constant and they responded successfully when presented with the tasks.”

Lesson # 7:

“The reading procedure worked well though it was the first time I implemented it. I learnt about it during the training course.”

“The students’ motivation was low when they had to answer the questions and even lower their participation in the activity on the photographs.”

Lesson # 8:

“All in all this was a quite interesting class. The students seemed to be very anxious to finish reading the story and most of them showed this by participating and expressing their feelings. They enjoyed reading the book as they applauded at the end. This always happens when they want to demonstrate their approval ...”

“Good participation in the discussion, especially in the plenary but, even more, in the manual work, which was the poster of the book-cover.”

Final comments:

“I was quite satisfied with this experience since it gave me the tools to carry out the reading project in a nice, orderly and relaxed atmosphere of work.”

“I think that the items I took into account in the development of the reading lessons were:

- The personal involvement of the learners,
- Their pace, and
- The steps of the reading lessons.

“As regards the appearance of the materials ... it was difficult to work on this since the appearance of the text was not the strongest point; in fact, it was the weakest.”

“On talking about the methodological procedure ... I think it was very clear and I always tried to keep the same order. The use of questions on predictions at the pre-reading stage was also constant and effective. I implemented text-related tasks at the post-reading stage, too. I have already mentioned the problem with the visuals, which lacked attractiveness. Throughout the reading project I conducted reading-beyond-the-lines activities so that the students could analyze the text more deeply rather than engaging in a mere retelling of the facts. I considered it useful making the students develop strategies such as skimming and scanning.”

“I wouldn’t follow the criteria I used in the past for the selection of extensive reading materials. Now I know that there are some other factors that have to be considered.”

“To overcome the difficulty of the visuals of the story, next time I would use the video to complement the lack of clarity of the photographs.”



“What I learnt from this part of the experience is that I could plan all the activities of the reading lessons in a clear order and, in this way, I noticed they were more practical, economical, useful and attractive to my students.”

“I learnt new information and reflected on the lessons I planned... That was during the training.”

“It was interesting and enriching to participate in a new project. It was useful, too. I think it was so for me and the other teachers. I never thought myself in the position of somehow teaching my colleagues. I felt relaxed and intended to make the presentation and lead the discussion as clearly as possible.”

**Appendix I: Story Evaluation Sheet****Reader:** The Secret Garden**Story Evaluation Sheet**

To be completed after the short story has been read.

1. How much did you enjoy the story? (Scale 1-10) .....
2. How would you describe the photographs of the story? Circle your answers.  
     Clear              Very clear              Not clear enough
3. Is the story of the appropriate length?  
     Short              Long              The appropriate length
4. Do you read and understand a story better if:  
     It is divided into chapters?  
     The teacher has to determine the beginning and end of each part?
5. Which were the tasks that helped you understand the message of the story?  
     Before-reading questions  
     After-reading questionnaires  
     True/False activities  
     Multiple Choice
6. Which were the activities you mostly enjoyed in relation to the story?  
     Answering questions              Expressing your feelings and opinions  
     True or false              Writing summaries  
     Playing games              Completing crossword-puzzles  
     Acting out dialogues              Making a poster  
     Group discussions              Completing charts  
     Observing and making comments on photographs
7. Would you recommend this story to another student to read? Why/Why not?

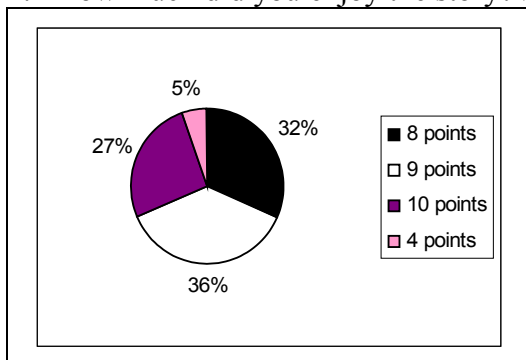
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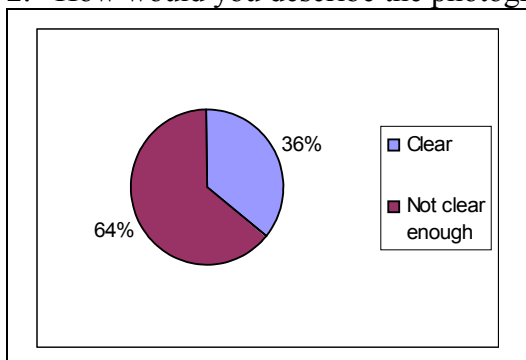
**Appendix J: Results obtained from the Story Evaluation Sheet.**

The following are the students' responses to the Story Evaluation sheet:

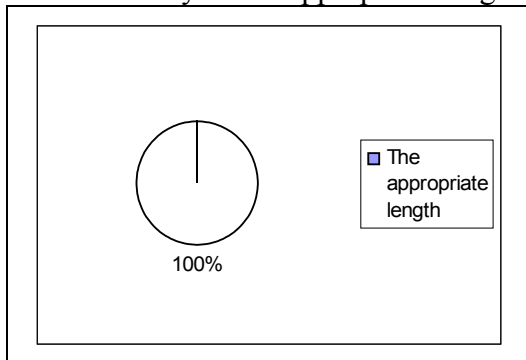
1. How much did you enjoy the story? Scale (1-10)



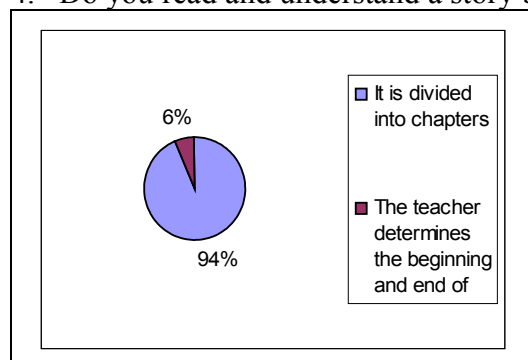
2. How would you describe the photographs of the story?



3. Is the story of the appropriate length?



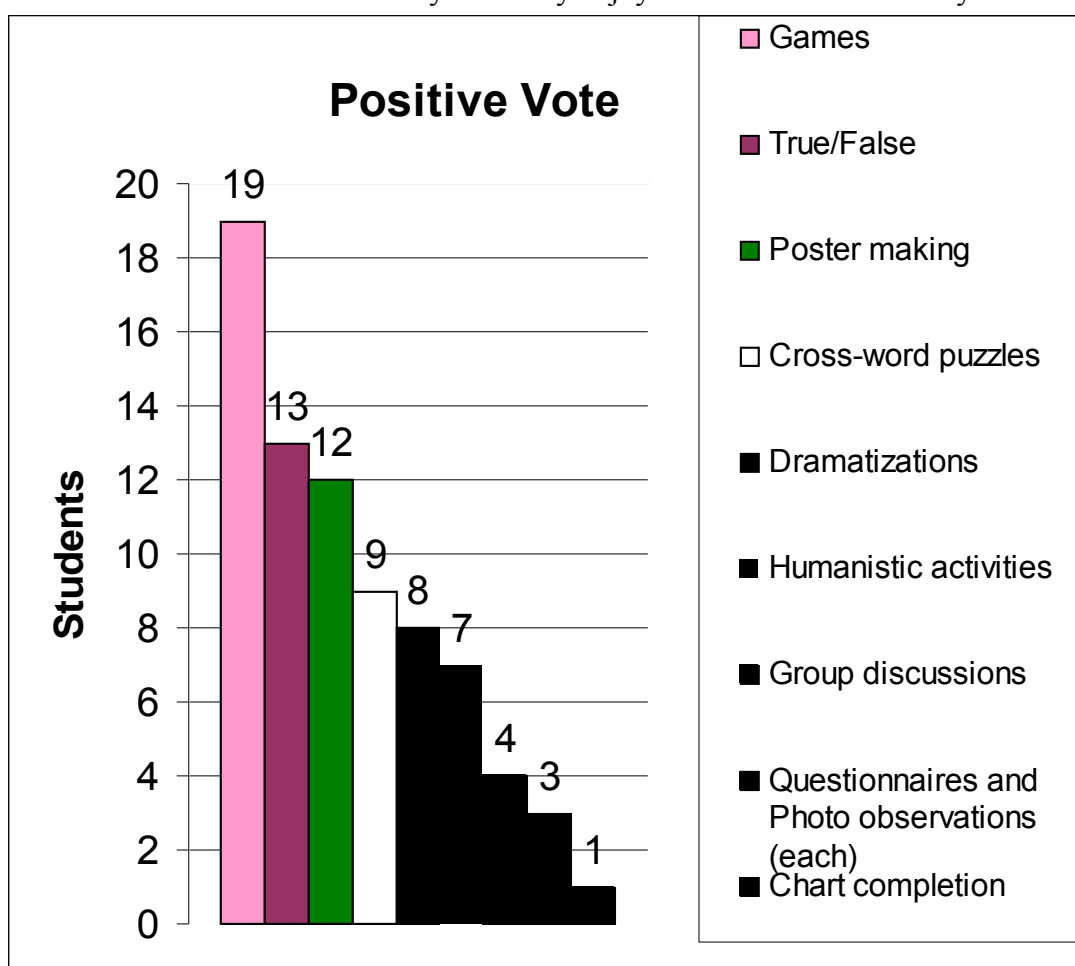
4. Do you read and understand a story better if:



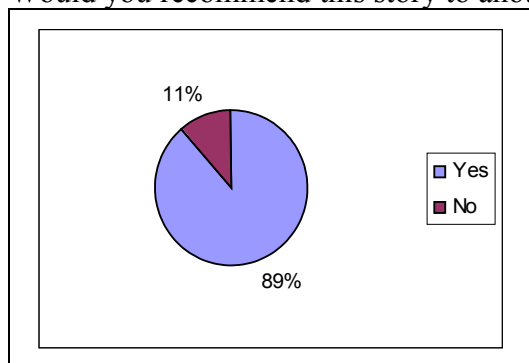
5. Which were the tasks that helped you understand the message of the story?

The mostly voted task was “Multiple Choice”, voted by 12 students.

6. Which were the activities you mostly enjoyed in relation to the story?



7. Would you recommend this story to another student to read?



8. Why?

